

International Plastic Bag Free Day: the fight against plastic bag pollution at risk with European countries granting too many exemptions

MAKE IT RIGHT: TIME FOR EUROPE TO ACT AGAINST PLASTIC BAG POLLUTION.



PRESS RELEASE – 3 July 2020

EU Member State measures, which aim to cut the number of plastic bags used nationally, are granting too many exemptions, warned the Rethink Plastic alliance on the 11th International Plastic Bag Free Day.

A new report published today by Surfrider Foundation Europe on behalf of the Rethink Plastic alliance called [Make it Right. Time for Europe to act against plastic bag pollution](#), reveals that while all EU countries have now transposed the EU Directive on plastic bags into their national laws, only some have taken ambitious action to cut plastic bag pollution at source.

The assessment, based on key contributions from the members of the [Break Free From Plastic](#) movement in Europe, shows that **most countries continue to authorise the use of single-use plastic bags by granting many exemptions, some clearly infringing the Directive**: single use biodegradable plastic bags (e.g. Italy, Austria, Malta), single-use biobased plastic bags (e.g. Brussels region in Belgium), bags sold in open markets (e.g. Greece, very lightweight plastic bags (in the majority of Member States) and even bags with no handle (e.g. Romania).

Plastic bags are one of too many major sources of pollution in our ocean. More than 100 billion bags were used in Europe alone in 2010. Together with other single-use plastic items, they are responsible for dramatic impacts on marine life and habitats, global economies and societies along the full plastic life cycle, and they carry major risks to our health. Symbols of our disposable society, plastic bags triggered action on a large number of other single-use items all around the world.

The plastic pollution crisis is immense, and the legislation that already exists can only contribute to reducing pollution if implemented and enforced on the ground.

"Too many EU countries have chosen low-ambition measures or allowed for many single-use plastic bags to continue to be used. With the objective of reducing consumption of plastic bags by half at the end of 2019, citizens are waiting for new measures to be adopted by July 2021 to further limit disposable plastics. It's time to make things right and ensure positive action to tackle plastic pollution". Said Gaëlle Haut, European Affairs Officer at Surfrider Foundation Europe, on behalf of the Rethink Plastic alliance

This 11th International Plastic Bag Free Day is being celebrated a year and a half ahead of the Commission's deadline to present results on the effectiveness of measures at Union level to address plastic bag pollution. At this crossroads, assessment results appear better than in 2018 but some already-expressed concerns still remain.

The Plastic Bag Directive has sadly left the door open for some private players to ask national governments for derogations for their products – in particular biodegradable bags. This has allowed for the continued use of some single-use plastic bags, irrespective of the many impacts they have on the environment and ocean. These derogations are putting attempts to tackle plastic pollution at risk and could possibly worsen necessary and urgent efforts to reduce marine litter and curb plastic use.

The Rethink Plastic alliance now calls on Member States to adopt ambitious measures to reduce the consumption of all single-use plastic bags in their territory and ensure proper enforcement of the measures adopted.

Member States are asked to **remove exemptions on biodegradable and bio-based plastic bags, in line with the Single Use Plastic Directive and adopt measures applying to all bags.**

Learn more about the ["Break the plastic wave"](#) campaign - #breaktheplasticwave

Download the report [Make it right. Time for Europe to act against plastic bag pollution](#)

www.surfrider.eu

CONTACT :

Surfrider Foundation Europe

Boulazreg Fella | presse@surfrider.eu

+ 33 (0) 7 67 18 29 71 | + 33 (0) 5 59 23 23 47



SURFRIDER FOUNDATION EUROPE - 33 Allée du Moura - 64200 Biarritz

www.surfrider.eu

NOTES:

- [Directive \(EU\) 2015/720](#) of the European Parliament and of the council of 29th April 2015, amending Directive 94/62/EC as regards reducing the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags.
- [Directive \(EU\) 2019/904](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment.
- [Why "bioplastics" won't solve plastic pollution](#), Rethink Plastic alliance, 2018.