
Plastic and plastic waste: EU developments and Euro Coop members' actions

April 2017

EU legislative background

On last 14th March MEPs voted on the draft amendments to four waste-management directives. The text that has been approved includes:

- An **80% target for recycling packaging materials** like paper, cardboard, plastics, metal, glass and wood by 2030;
- The **mandatory separate collection** of the main waste streams;
- The increased use of **economic instruments** such as deposit-return schemes and taxes.

This vote is a crucial step to moving towards a more resource-efficient and circular economy in the European Union. Minimising the generation of waste, and ensuring that resources are retained in the economy for as long as possible are key pillars of a circular economy. **Plastic is one of five priorities in the "EU action plan for the Circular Economy"**.

Plastic is a very useful material in many ways. When used in packaging, it has many advantages, such as being lightweight, and its ability to keep perishable products fresh for longer. These are contributing factors for why over 40% of plastics produced in Europe are used in packaging. However, plastic is also associated with many **negative environmental externalities**. Plastic from packaging is particularly important to consider, given that it has a high potential for littering because of its **low relative value**. Plastics are of particular concern when they end up in the **marine environment** because they **do not break down naturally**, they can be **vehicles for toxins**, and they **can be ingested** by marine life and seabirds.

Some of these environmental issues result from very low reuse and recycling rates for end-of-life plastics, particularly in comparison to other materials. In 2014, only 30% of post-consumer plastic waste was recycled, meaning that plastics have a high dependency on fossil fuel feedstock. According to the European Commission, it is expected that if current trends persist, plastic production will account for **20% of global oil consumption and 15% of global annual carbon emissions by 2050**.

We would like to use this **pivotal moment** in the policy-making process to highlight the ways in which some of Euro Coop's members are **making changes to how they use plastic** and the **steps they are taking to make their operations more circular**. Please see a snapshot of these good practices here below.

A snapshot of Euro Coop members' actions

Coop Italy



Coffee Pods

In 2014, Coop Italy partnered with Italian coffee roasting company Co.Ind and bioplastics producer Novamont as part of a project to produce **compostable coffee capsules** for the Coop branded coffee machine. The compostable capsules entered the market in June 2016 as a range called “Tintoretto”, after the Italian Renaissance painter. These capsules can be **placed directly into the municipal collection of organic waste, without any need for separation**. Later this year, all the coffee pods that are compatible with the Coop coffee machine will be made using these compostable pods.

Bulk detergent

Beginning in 2009, **in-store bulk detergent dispensers** were introduced for Coop Italy private label detergents. This is in-line with the “reuse” part of Coop Italy’s “3R” policy. In order to be effective and have real environmental benefits, a minimum number of reuses are required. On average, **the bottles are reused 4 to 7 times each**. The scheme was further expanded in 2015, with the number of stores dispensing bulk detergent increasing from 160 in 2010 to **263 in 2015**.



Biodegradable bags

In 2009, Coop Italy made a commitment as part of the Retailers’ Environmental Action Programme to increase the sale bags made of Mater-Bi, a group of **bioplastics containing starch and vegetable oils** that are **biodegradable and compostable**. From a baseline of zero in 2009, by 2015, about 200 million biodegradable bags had been sold.

Microbeads

None of Coop Italy’s private-label products **contain microbeads**.

Coop Norway



Cotton buds

In a bid to reduce plastic waste, and specifically **plastics that often end up as marine litter**, Coop Norway have launched cotton buds that have **paper sticks rather than plastic ones**.

Milk carton caps

Coop Norway have a longstanding and fruitful relationship with the supplier of their own-brand organic milk, Rørosmeieriet. In the first quarter of 2016, in collaboration with the packaging supplier Elopak, the **plastic caps on Coop Norway Änglamark milk became fully recyclable**. As well as being fully recyclable, the polyethylene used to make the caps is produced from **biomass from second generation feedstock, rather than petroleum-based sources**.



Microbeads

Microbeads are **banned in all Coop Norway's private-label products**.

The Co-operative Group



Trays for fish and meat

Amorphous polyethylene terephthalate (aPET) is a common rigid plastic used to package food, especially meat and fish. However, a problem with aPET is that it often has a layer of polythene on it to allow a film lid to be securely heat-sealed into place. While this is good for the safety of the food inside, it makes the packaging very difficult to recycle. The Co-operative Group worked with their extended value chain, and particularly their packaging and protein suppliers, to make informed decisions on alternative polymers and simplification of the packaging. As a result of this collaboration, **The Co-operative Group have pioneered with the removal of the heat-seal layer from aPET trays**, thus allowing them to be recycled in a more financially viable way.

This is in line with The Co-operative Group's strategy for plastics. By 2020, the Co-operative Group aim that 80% of the packaging from their private label products will be easy to recycle. They will do this by **simplifying pots, tubs and trays** to make it **more attractive for local authorities to collect them for recycling**.

Milk bottle caps

Contamination is a huge burden when trying to maximise recycling rates. In the case of milk bottles, the caps used in the UK have traditionally been dark green, blue and red. If caps mistakenly ended up with the milk bottles when they were being recycled, this meant that the colour would come out a greyish colour, rather than cloudy white. By changing the colour of their milk bottle



caps, the Co-op have been able to tackle this contamination problem. Now, **if the caps enter the bottle recycling stream, it results in minimal colour contamination.** This means that recyclable plastic does not go to waste. After making this change, many other retailers followed suit.

Microbeads

The Co-operative Group **do not use microbeads in any of their own-brand products** and their policy is to only use naturally biodegradable materials, or alternatives that are demonstrably biodegradable in the marine environment. The last time that a Co-op brand product contain a scrub ingredient was in 1998. At that time, ground apricot shell, a naturally biodegradable material, was used. The Co-operative Group also **stopped sourcing branded products containing microbeads in September 2016.**

S Group



EcoFishBox



In 2015, the S Group tested a **new fibre-based packaging solution** for fish products to replace the traditional Styrofoam boxes. Renewable wood fibre is used to make the EcoFishBox. It is waterproof and leak tight because of a thin PET-film that is pre-laminated on the liner and the special way of the packaging is folded. When tested by the S Group, it was found that **the fibre-based box performed well in the logistics chain,** as well as being

more environmentally friendly than the Styrofoam packaging because it is 100% recyclable. Although uptake has been slow, other retailers are now using the EcoFishBox too. Designer of the EcoFishBox, Mika Tuhkunen of Stora Enso, won the Nordic Scanstar packaging award in June 2016.

Collection of consumer packaging

Collection of consumer packaging plastic waste started 1st of January 2016 through a **network of eco take-back points.** This is managed by packaging producer organizations set up to take care of producer responsibilities on behalf of their members (e.g. retailers) and to ensure cost-effective collection and waste management of consumer packaging materials like cardboard, metal, glass and plastic. This is based on the packaging and packaging waste regulation in Finland. According to this regulation, collection facilities must also be located next to retail outlets. Investment and maintenance of this scheme is funded by 5000 firms including the S Group.

Microbeads

Microbeads are **banned in all the S Group's private label products.**

About Euro Coop

Euro Coop is the **voice of the co-operative retailers in Europe**. Our association brings together the national associations of consumer co-operatives in 19 European countries, which represent 4,500 local/regional cooperatives, employ 500,000 citizens across Europe and operate 36,000 stores which serve **32 million consumer-members daily**. Euro Coop's members together are **Europe's second strongest retail force** – accounting for **€ 76 billion in annual turnover** from sales. For more information, please visit our website at: www.eurocoop.coop

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