



REPORT

THE ROLE OF BIOWASTE IN THE EMERGING CIRCULAR ECONOMY **Creating new jobs from managing biowaste**

Key-decision makers and stakeholders were on June 24 brought together by the European Parliament Intergroup on “*Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development*” with the support of the European Compost Network to discuss the pivotal role of biowaste in the emerging circular economy framework.

An Le Nouail Marlière, Rapporteur on the EESC opinion on the Circular Economy Initiative, European Economic and Social Committee, welcomed the participants by introducing the recent opinions on the circular economy produced by the EESC. It was stressed that the EESC encourages a collaborative and inclusive new circular economy model with a structured dialogue among stakeholders. Further, emphasis was put on the social aspects such as ensuring decent work for all and improving the health and safety standards for workers. The fight against international environmental dumping was also stressed and the vital involvement of local authorities and communities.

Miriam Dalli MEP and Chair of the “Circular Economy” Working Group of the EP Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development”, chaired the event and highlighted that the topic of biowaste is of utmost importance. Economies have in the past used a linear model encouraging non-sustainable behaviour, and a change in mentality is needed as we strive to look beyond waste and close the loop of the economy. Resources must be managed more efficiently, which would also bring more growth and job opportunities. Diverging policies are found in Member States and the management varies depending on local conditions and capabilities. Little action is taken in some and more ambition is found in others. The implementation and enforcement must therefore improve to ensure that biowaste contributes to a more sustainable environment and economy.

John van Haeff, Chair of European Compost Network, highlighted that in order to ensure the same high quality of life for future generations we must better manage our resources and transition to a circular economy. The sustainable management of biowaste will play a key role in this transition. The ECN represents the organic recycling sector in Europe and promotes sustainable recycling practices with the aim to produce high quality products. Many Member States have already implemented separate collection streams of organic waste but some are still searching for the best practices and means of implementation. Biowaste has great resource potential such as soil improvement, renewable energy and contributing to the bio-economy. The biowaste sector also has great employment potential. It was recommended that obligations be set for separate collection of biowaste as well as clear recycling targets. End-of-waste criteria should also be set for compost and digestate enabling a sustainable market for bio-based products.



Marco Ricci, Chair of International Solid Waste Association (ISWA) Working group 'Biological Treatment', CIC – Italian Composting and Biogas Association, highlighted the importance as well as the possibilities of implementing separate collection streams of biowaste in urban areas. Large and constant participation was stressed as one of the important factors when dealing with foodwaste. Households can be convinced to separate their waste as long as they are provided with the right tools such as vented kitchen-caddies and bio-bags. Separate collection of biowaste has also shown to lead to higher capture rates and higher quality of fractions of waste, particularly of other dry recyclables. The city of Milan was presented as a case study highlighting that separate collection is possible in cities. Low contamination of feedstock is the key element for producing quality compost and digestate allowing for increased recycling. The management of municipal solid waste is also found to be economically sustainable.

Enzo Favoino, Chair the Scientific Committee of Zero Waste Europe, stressed the importance of local authorities in the circular economy and the role of zero waste programmes. One important element of a zero waste programme is the implementation of the kerbside collection, which must include organic material. Waste prevention is also crucial as well as the pay-as-you-throw system, which is based on rewards and penalties. A multitude of cities are paving their way to zero waste and there are several success stories such as the Contarina District, Italy and Ljubljana, Slovenia, which have managed to maximise the separate collection of organics and dry recyclables. Further, kerbside and zero waste programmes may be implemented while maintaining low management costs. The key is to reduce the amount of residual waste as organic material plays a fundamental role in achieving high material recovery rates. By minimising organics in residual waste it is possible to shrink its collection rounds, which saves money and exerts a further driving effect to increase separate collection of dry recyclables. With regards to policy-making it is essential that the proper management of biowaste is supported through appropriate regulatory drivers such as re-sentencing article 22 of the Waste Framework Directive to ensure that Member States implement separate collection. Further, result-oriented targets e.g. in terms of a certain percentage of biowaste to be captured by separate collection are also needed.

Anna Karamat, Policy Officer for "Waste Management and Recycling" in DG Environment, European Commission, highlighted that the Commission is in full preparation for the new circular economy package, which will consist of a new waste proposal and a communication outlining other concrete actions to take in the coming years to move towards a circular economy. With regards to the past proposal there were diverging views in the Council, which is something that must be taken into account for the new package. Biowaste was reiterated as a valuable resource that should not end up in landfills. The Commission encourages the establishment of separate collection of biowaste, but it has not yet decided whether it will propose an obligatory separate collection of biowaste. The Commission recognises the need to improve the market for secondary materials in Europe by regulating fertilisers made from biowaste. The ongoing public consultation on the circular economy,



which was launched by the Commission in May and will run until the end of August, was highlighted and it was called upon all stakeholders to participate and provide their views¹.

Eric Liegeois, teamleader on fertilisers, detergents, plant protection products, biocides, plastic and waste recycling activities in DG GROW, European Commission, presented the potential of domestic biowaste for market of fertilising products. Biowaste has great potential to substitute fertilisers and in order to reach this we need to transform the potential capacities into values. In order to achieve this objective more research is needed along with technology improvements. Structural changes are also needed as well as a cross-sectorial relationship. The collection of post-consumption biowaste must be optimised in order to guarantee quality of input materials for compost and digestate. The regional and local level should be the focus as they must adapt to the structural change to the available volume and concentration of biowaste. Acceptance by users is also essential. A revised fertiliser regulation proposal is under discussion with the aim to create a level playing field for biowaste derived fertilisers.

Pavel Telicka MEP (ALDE group, Czech Republic), responsible for the opinion of the EP ITRE Committee on the dossier “Waste Management”, emphasised the positive side of withdrawing the circular economy package as it is an opportunity to instead cover the whole loop. There are various elements that are vital for a new proposal including a global perspective, research and innovation, and consumer behaviour. It must be an ambitious but realistic framework, which is easily adaptable to local conditions and capabilities. It was also called upon the Commission to conduct an additional impact assessment. The ongoing public consultation was also stressed highlighting that the Commission should continue to involve all stakeholders throughout the process and in the implementation of the circular economy. The European Parliament will continue to set high demands and insert pressures on achieving the goals throughout the process.

Unico Van Kooten, Dutch Waste Management Association, stressed that the focus of the circular economy should be to stop large scale landfilling. Organic material is a valuable resource and when it is sent to landfills it becomes a cost for the environment. The instruments can already be found in the Waste Framework Directive but the actions are not yet there. The focus should be on biowaste and separate collection as this can have a profound effect on the rest of recyclables. It was stressed that it is more cost effective to move from large scale landfills to composting. There is no economic barrier to why biowaste should not be used as a valuable resource. Local and regional governance was also highlighted touching upon the Structural and Cohesion Funds. It was discussed that funds given to local authorities are often too high, which does not incentivise them to use the money correctly and often leads to inefficient results.

Dr Andreas Jaron, Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, Germany, further stressed the benefits of collecting biowaste as it is a

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/consultations/closing_the_loop_en.htm



positive contribution to soil, resource and climate protection. It was also reiterated that biowaste is only a positive contribution if or when it is collected separately and properly. It was highlighted that the withdrawal of the previous circular economy proposal was a bad political signal but the proposal itself was not sufficient. There was no sufficient impact assessment and no previous communication with Member States. It entailed unpractical and unachievable targets and did not provide the necessary tools. It was pointed out that the unified calculation method proposed would not allow Member States to reach 70%. Further, indicators and targets are not an instrument by itself to achieve environmental goals. The right tools to achieve goals include duties, requirements, knowledge transfer, money, sanctions and incentives. A better, practical and achievable proposal with clear definitions is expected that also takes into account the different situations in Member States.

Sofie Bouteligier, OVAM - Public Waste Agency of Flanders, presented the case of Flanders and how they are transitioning to a sustainable bio-economy. Flanders is a small region and in its development of its vision, strategy and implementation plans, it looks to EU strategies for guidance as well as to neighbouring and other countries for inspiration and cooperation. Moving from a fossil-based to a bio-based economy brings several environmental, social and economic benefits. Flanders is also faced with some challenges that need to be dealt with at EU level. There are several policies developed by various DGs but they are not aligned. In order to establish a level playing field for all relevant sectors in the bio-economy, it is essential that the EU establishes a coherent framework and that different policy initiatives do not create contradictory incentives. Without a coherent EU framework a multitude of difficulties can be foreseen such as market distortion for secondary materials.

The discussion with the audience further highlighted the vital role of the regional and local level. The difference in governance and decision-making power in various Member States was stressed and the need to have a common definition of municipal waste, clear roles and extended producer responsibility. Information is also needed as local decision-makers are being misled that separate collection is too expensive. Best practices were also shared including the need to communicate with households and consumers. The importance of technology was also stressed and the sharing of know-how. It was further pointed out that waste statistics are very weak and new realistic calculations are needed. Countries that are lagging behind need to be pushed by means of legally binding targets, and it was stressed that landfill bans can play an important part in strengthening enforcement.

Miriam Dalli MEP concluded the meeting by further reminding the participants and all other stakeholders to engage in the ongoing public consultation on the circular economy as it is the opportunity to shape the outcome of this package.

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