



The effect of marine litter on fisheries and oceans

5 September 2018 – European Parliament



This event was hosted by MEP Ricardo Serrão Santos, and brought together representatives from policy, practice, NGO and civil society, to engage in an informed debate on the topic of marine litter and the relevant European Commission proposals of key importance. The panel also included:

- MEP Alain Cadec, (by video-message)
- MEP Massimo Paolucci, ENVI Shadow Rapporteur for the ‘single-used plastics’ proposal
- MEP Maria Spyraiki, EPP Shadow Rapporteur for ITRE opinion on the ‘single-used plastics’ proposal
- Bernhard Friess, Director of ‘Maritime Policy and Blue Economy’ Directorate, DG MARE
- Joanna Toole, Fishing Operations and Technology Branch, FAO
- Christine Haffner-Sifakis, Strategic Policy & Programme Officer, UN Environment
- Hæge Andenæs, Director General, Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment
- Nadia Moalla Gil, Project Manager, Confederación Española de Pesca (Cepesca)
- Janica Borg, Policy coordinator for marine protection and spatial planning, WWF
- Dr. Dominic Hogg, Eunomia Research & Consulting



MEP Ricardo Serrão Santos opened the conference welcoming the awareness raised on the issue of marine litter. Underlining the need for global governance, Mr. Serrão Santos stated that the European Parliament is well engaged and responding to the problem co-involved in the legislation files and initiative reports addressing subjects like this one. In addition, he highlighted that the efforts of our coastal communities towards this direction are of significant importance, as “communities acting together can create the necessary change needed”. Mr. Serrão Santos also gave some examples of concrete actions in remote oceanic islands like Azores.

During her intervention, **MEP Maria Spyraiki**, EPP Shadow Rapporteur for ITRE opinion on the ‘Single-Use Plastics’ proposal, underlined the fact that plastics are going to surpass the number of fish by 2050. Regarding this, a key part of the problem are the current poor recycling rates of plastics. Therefore, raising awareness, engaging local and regional authorities, as well as assisting SMEs' work towards this direction are of key importance, when discussing about plastics and marine litter. “We need a global approach to combat plastic pollution and we must seek measures on the level of G7 and G20, as well as the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. At the same time, we have to work with our consumers and SMEs in order to achieve circular transformation”, replacing Single-Use Plastics (SUP) through investments, as well as introducing new models of consumption.

Representing the European Commission, DG MARE Director of ‘Maritime Policy and Blue Economy’ Directorate **Bernhard Friess** stated that a lot of the plastic produced is washed to the sea, and is a problem for humans and the ecosystems. According to Mr. Friess, within the SUP proposal the European Commission wants to facilitate the re-use and recycling of plastics, focusing on creating jobs and benefiting the economy. “The case of sustainable fisheries is a good example of how regulating stocks can create benefits to the sector’s economy”. Although plastics have plenty uses in everyday life, there is an urgent need to make sure that production and use become more circular. With reference to marine litter originating from maritime activities, Mr. Friess mentioned that they contribute to around 20-40% of the problem, and believes that considerable part of the litter derives from fishing gear. At the moment only 0.1% is being recycled according to Mr. Friess, while improvement is needed. From the Commission’s point of view, fishermen are part of the solution, as they know that the healthier the oceans, the better the business can be for them, too. As a result, many initiatives are in place at European level, while the three European Commission proposals (‘European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy’, ‘Proposal for a new Directive on Port Reception Facilities’ and SUP) serve to address the above in a holistic manner.

MEP Massimo Paolucci, ENVI Shadow Rapporteur for the SUP proposal, opened his speech highlighting that the ocean is a treasure for our life. Concerning the economic magnitude of the problem, it was mentioned that in the EU 630,000,000€ are needed to clean the beaches annually, so “we should support the fishermen community and set up financial guarantees and reimbursements”. All in all, there's a need to organize awareness-raising campaigns on marine litter, introduce clear labeling of products, involve producers and propose incentives for them. “The EU can not act alone, and private initiatives are not sufficient”; government action is therefore crucial. With reference to the above, the SUP proposal provides the right guidance; the single use lifestyle has to change, as our resources are finite.



Following the above interventions, during his video-message **MEP Alain Cadec**'s stressed the close connection between fisheries and the respect of the environment; consequently, "fishing must become more sustainable, so this activity can be passed on to other generations". As Mr. Cadec noted, "marine pollution is becoming increasingly visible and affects the oceans around the world. Plastic, which accounts for 80-85% of stranded beach waste, is a ubiquitous product in our lives. However, because of its persistence and toxicity, it becomes harmful when leaked in the environment. The ecosystems and the marine fauna are the first victims, and in turn, all the other sectors that depend on it are affected". Regarding the European Commission proposals, Mr. Cadec welcomed these initiatives, commenting that they "must work in a coherent manner, in line with the possibilities offered by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, currently under negotiation for the period 2021-2027". All in all, "the fight against marine litter is everyone's business: marine pollution is not about putting the blame on a single actor. It requires a collective effort where everyone must play a role, whether as a consumer, producer or fisherman".

Joanna Toole from Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations then presented the 'Progress towards addressing abandoned, lost and otherwise discarded fishing gear at intergovernmental level and next steps for implementation'. "Ghost fishing has a socioeconomic impact", and this is of great concern to FAO which has the overall objective of enhancing food security at a global level. Furthermore, FAO is addressing the issue of marine litter, assessing the implications of microplastics on aquaculture, but also on humans. From Ms. Toole's point of view, multi-stakeholder partnerships will play an important role in addressing the above. Correspondingly, FAO invited the EU to support the implementation of the Umbrella Global Programme through financial contributions and partnership arrangements.

Moreover, **Christine Haffner-Sifakis**, Strategic Policy & Programme Officer at United Nations Environment Programme, introduced the 'Progress on UN Environment's work on healthy, resilient and productive oceans'. Ms. Haffner-Sifakis noted that an assessment of the effectiveness of relevant frameworks showed that the current governance strategies provide a fragmented approach, which does not adequately address marine litter and microplastics. Regional plans and projects are of high importance, while eco-design and green manufacturing, alongside integrated waste management are needed to tackle this global problem.

Within her presentation, **Hæge Andenæs**, Director General of the Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment, presented Norway's efforts to tackle marine litter. In this context, Norway's 'White Paper on Waste Policies' serves to identify the largest sources of marine litter and microplastics, proposing national measures on waste collected at sea, microplastics from car tires, and more. Moreover, EPR systems are already in place regarding packaging, and are considered for aquaculture and fisheries. In addition, While Ms. Andenæs mentioned that existing measures are also pushed at a UNEA level, Norway has been working with IMO as well on the issue. With reference to the relevant European Commission proposals, Ms. Andenæs welcomed the work at EU level, mentioning that "it's a strong set of measures and Norway will support these efforts".

Nadia Moalla Gil, Head of RTDI projects of the Spanish Fishing Confederation (Cepesca), underlined that Cepesca remains a committed ally in the global efforts of tackling marine litter. It was also mentioned that the Spanish government has monitored the marine litter situation in Spain, where only 2% of marine litter



corresponds to fishing activity. However, two weaknesses were identified according to her intervention; the lack of fishermen training, alongside the lack of a co-ordinated plan to tackle marine litter. As a result, Ms. Moalla Gil called for better implementation of the Extended Producers Responsibility, as in some ports ship-owners have to pay for the management of the waste collected voluntarily by their ships, as if they were the producers. Therefore, collecting marine litter should not be an extra cost for the fishing sector.

After that, Policy co-ordinator for marine protection and spatial planning in WWF-European Policy Office **Janica Borg** highlighted that plastics are a global issue, as can be nowadays found in large amounts even at the Arctic. “Plastics are durable and, once they come in the sea, they stay there. Moreover, birds die from ingesting small particles of plastic that probably carry with them other harmful substances as well”. According to Ms. Borg, WWF Mediterranean has also shown that very few species can escape the problem of plastic in the seas; “8 million tonnes of plastic are released into the oceans every year, the equivalent of the Belgian, Dutch and German populations combined. Pollution is one of the greatest threats to marine wildlife today”. However, there is a silver lining in the problem; public interest has never been higher. While the current status quo is unacceptable, mainly due to legal gaps, there is a need for “a clear, global, legally binding commitment to end plastic pollution. We need effective measures to make this happen. The EU single-use plastic proposal is a good first step; the EU now has the opportunity to be a global front runner”.

Last but not least, **Dominic Hogg**, Eonomia Research & Consulting Chair, addressed the public mentioning that 49% of plastics are Single-Use Plastics. As a result, the urgent need for a change of culture is now of key importance; “we all know that we don’t want any waste going in the seas”. As Dr. Hogg noted, businesses are moving very quickly in changing their practices following public pressure. Towards this direction, “the role of policy is to help businesses change”, so policy-makers have to provide the guidance, as voluntary commitments are not enough.