

Commissioner Mr Karmenu Vella

Commissioner Mr Miguel Arias Cañete

Comments from Norway, Sweden, Luxemburg, Finland, France and Iceland on the possible requirement of microplastic filters - for household washing machines

Dear Commissioners Vella and Cañete,

The environmental impacts of marine plastic litter and microplastics is of great concern to Norway, Sweden, Luxemburg, Finland, France and Iceland and we welcome the European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy. However, on the unintentional release of microplastics from textiles, we would welcome more concrete action.

In specific, we see a considerable potential in the option of introducing a requirement on microplastic filters for household washing machines. The eco-design and energy labelling requirements of household washing machines are currently subject to a review. A decision on the new requirements are foreseen in October.

In this context, Norway, Sweden, Luxemburg, Finland, France and Iceland welcomes the proposal for revised eco-design and energy labelling requirements for household washing machines, and refer to the public consultation of the inception impact assessment of this proposal¹. However, we suggest that the Commission reviews the regulation on eco-design and energy labelling requirements for household washing machines in light of the technological progress before the next scheduled review, in order to speed up the process of reducing microplastic fibre discharges for this major emission source. We propose that this is reflected in article 7 of the European Commission's Proposal for a regulation by stating that such a review should take place within two years after enter into force of the regulation.

Discharges from households and professional washing machines have been identified as one of the major sources of microfiber emissions into the marine environment by the Commission in the European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy² as well as in screenings in various countries. We would therefore promote EU-wide measures on washing machines in order to efficiently reduce the discharge of microfibers into the marine environment. Securing efficient measures to reduce marine litter and microplastics is of high priority to us.

Research on sources of microplastics have shown that several thousand fibres of microplastics can be released by a synthetic garment during a single wash. As neither state of the art washing machines nor wastewater and sewage treatment plants are designed to filter out the microfibers, many of the fibres are discharged to sea.

Microfibers from laundry wastewater have been encountered in marine sediments, ecosystems, runoff, and sewage water around the world. Microfibers from natural textile such as cotton might cause many of the same negative effects in biota as microfibers from synthetic textiles does, as both

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations/public-consultation-ecodesign-and-energy-labelling-refrigerators-dishwashers-washing-machines-televvisions-computers-and-lamps_en

² COM(2018) 28 final

have been subjected to various chemical treatments. Measures only targeting synthetic textiles will thus only solve part of the problem.

The Mermaids³ project collected data on European laundry habits, as well as textile and detergent properties. The project has been one of the main contributors to bringing the microfiber problem to public attention.

Following the Mermaids project, individual EU member states are taking initiatives on a national level to reduce the discharge of microfibers from synthetic clothing. For example, The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency will initiate a study aimed at investigating the benefits for the environment as well as the technical and economic challenges for the manufacturers of washing machines. Conclusions from the study are expected to be ready by the end of 2018.

The number of commercial solutions, ranging from filter solutions that can be retrofitted to existing washing machines to filter bags, is increasing. However, these solutions rely on consumer action, which is likely to limit the impact. We believe that measures to reduce the problem decided on an EU-level will be more efficient and thus have a larger positive impact on the environment.

In summary, we therefore encourage the Commission to, as a matter of priority; investigate a requirement of microplastics filters for household washing machines.

Sincerely yours,



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Finland



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³ <http://life-mermaids.eu/en/deliverables-mermaids-life-2/>