Packaging and packaging waste: reduction of the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags

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In accordance with the Directive on packaging (Directive 94/62/EC amended by Directive (EU) 2015 /7201), the Commission presented a report examining the impact of the use of oxo-degradable plastic carrier bags on the environment and, if appropriate, present a legislative proposal.

So called oxo-plastics or oxo-degradable plastics are conventional plastics which include additives to accelerate the fragmentation of the material into very small pieces, triggered by UV radiation or heat exposure. This accelerated fragmentation would also accelerate biodegradation. Some stakeholders present “oxo-biodegradation” as the solution to environmental impacts of plastic in the open environment.

Issues examined: the Commission examined the **impact of so-called oxo-degradable plastic on the environment** beyond plastic carrier bags and underpinned its assessment by a study published in April 2017, addressing the following three key issues:

- the biodegradability of oxo-degradable plastic in various environments,
- environmental impacts in relation to littering, and
- issues related to recycling.

Within these areas, a number of distinct hypotheses were defined, relating to claims and assumptions from the oxo-degradable industry about the material. On the basis of evidence gathered with respect to the hypotheses, these were analysed to ascertain whether they can be supported or refuted.

Key findings: taking into consideration the key findings of the supporting study as well as other available reports, there is **no conclusive evidence** on a number of important issues relating to beneficial effects of oxo-degradable plastic on the environment.

While it undisputed that oxo-degradable plastic, including plastic carrier bags, may degrade quicker in the open environment than conventional plastic, there is no evidence that oxo-degradable plastic will subsequently fully biodegrade in a reasonable time in the open environment, on landfills or in the **marine environment**.

A wide range of scientists, international and governmental institutions, testing laboratories, trade associations of plastics manufacturers, recyclers and other experts have therefore come to the conclusion that oxo-degradable plastics are **not a solution for the environment** and that oxo-degradable plastic is not suited for long-term use, recycling or composting;

Claims presenting oxo-degradable plastic as an "oxo-biodegradable" solution to littering which has no negative impact on the environment, in particular by not leaving any fragments of plastic or toxic residues behind, are not substantiated by evidence. In the absence of conclusive evidence of a beneficial effect on the environment and indeed indications to the contrary, given the related **misleading claims** to consumers and risks of resulting littering behaviour, **EU wide measures should be considered**. Therefore, in the context of the European plastics strategy, a process to restrict the use of oxo-plastics in the EU will be started.