

# The impact on fisheries of marine litter

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The Committee on Fisheries adopted the own-initiative report by Catherine CHABAUD (Renew Europe, FR) on the impact on fisheries of marine litter.

Marine waste means all waste that has entered the marine environment, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and is identified by size (nano-, micro- and mega-waste) and nature (containers, bulky waste lying on the ocean floor, plastics, fishing gear, wrecks of semi-sunken vessels, hazardous waste such as explosives and other war debris, textile fibres, microplastics, etc.). 70 % of the marine litter that enters the sea ends up on the seabed and the cumulative mass of waste floating on the surface accounts for only 1 % of plastic in the ocean.

## *Improving the legislative framework and governance on marine litter*

Members stressed the need to revise the EU's integrated maritime policy with a view to establishing a more strategic framework, including on marine litter, that incorporates all waste and marine environment laws. In addition, they stressed the need to improve the European legislative framework to reduce financial costs for fishers who accidentally catch marine litter when fishing and to avoid presenting them with an excessive bureaucratic burden.

In order to improve and enhance the effectiveness of the legislative framework and governance relating to the collection, disposal and recycling of marine waste, the report stressed that it is essential to promote the greater involvement of all those working in the fishing sector and to broaden the existing awareness-raising, prevention and training projects with a view to ensuring the continuous exchange of information in order to support the preparation and updating of the relevant rules.

## *Improving research and knowledge on marine waste*

The shortage of available data and studies make it difficult to quantify the exact extent to which damage caused by marine litter is affecting the fisheries sector and its negative economic consequences for fishers. The Commission and the Member States are called to step up research finance and data collection on the amount and various types of litter in European waters and its impact on fisheries, aquaculture and ecosystems and to propose robust measures to address and prevent the impact of nano- and microplastics on both fishery resources and human health.

The report called for improved reporting on the loss of fishing gear at sea.

## *Circular economy in the fisheries and aquaculture sector*

The report stressed that reducing the impact of marine waste is contingent on improvements to the circular economy on land, including phasing out unnecessary plastic and packaging and transforming waste into resources, and on the adoption of a life-cycle approach in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. In order to accelerate the development of the circular economy in the fishing and aquaculture sector, it is essential to plan future legislative solutions to the problem of marine waste collection and disposal in conjunction with the European Green Deal. Member States should swiftly follow up on the setting of national minimum collection rates for fishing gear containing plastic, as agreed to in the directive on single-use plastics.

Members called on the Commission to create a specific fund to support Member States that establish production chains for recycled and environmentally friendly gear, using resources such as those under the NextGenerationEU instrument and from tax penalties imposed following infringement proceedings against Member States.

### *Collection and management programmes for marine waste*

The report called for the drawing up an EU-level action plan to combat littering in the EU's hydrosphere by reducing waste at its source, cutting down on plastic use and consumption. It urged Member States and regions to collect data on, monitor and take action to address the issue of poor management of waste on land, to clear up hotspot areas in rivers and estuaries where marine waste has accumulated and to introduce measures to prevent marine waste from reaching the environment in the first place. Members urged the allocation of sufficient funding to clean up all types of plastic-derived pollutants.

Members stressed that fishers should be adequately trained on how to handle marine waste properly during collection, landing, disposal and delivery for recycling in order to minimise the health and safety risks.

Member States are urged, in this regard, to establish a 'special fund for cleaning the seas', managed through the new European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) or other relevant budget lines, in order to finance the following actions: (1) the collection at sea by fishers of marine litter, (2) the provision of adequate on-board waste storage facilities and the monitoring of passively fished litter, (3) improvements in operator training, (4) the financing of the costs of both waste treatment and the personnel required for the operation of such programmes to avoid the increase in costs for fishers who participate voluntarily, and (5) investments in ports so that appropriate reception and storage facilities can be provided for the lost fishing gear and marine waste collected.