

Regulation on Plastic Pellet pollution: Council adopts its General Approach

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Today, December 17, EU Council adopted a [general approach](#) on the [Proposal for a Regulation aimed at preventing pellet losses to reduce microplastic pollution](#).

Positive developments:

- The regulation's scope is more comprehensive, with a stronger definition of plastic pellets, recognition of different facets of the supply chain, and inclusion of companies responsible for cleaning plastic pellet containers and tanks.
- IMO's recommendations on transportation of plastic pellets by sea, with continued EU leadership in their development, have now been included in the scope, with a binding character that they did not have as an IMO circular.
- Inclusion of SMEs handling more than 1000 tons of plastic pellets per year in the scope of certification (but this only applies 4 years after the entry into force of the Regulation).
- Distinguishing responsibilities and obligations between EU and non-EU carriers can ensure consistent and comprehensive protection.
- A new article on evaluation and review ensures the regulation's effectiveness is regularly assessed, enabling informed updates and adjustments based on real-world data and implementation.

Negative developments:

- Accountability gaps:
 - The exemption for companies handling less than 5 tonnes of plastic pellets per year fails to account for the inherent spill risks associated with all pellet-handling activities.
 - The 1,000-ton threshold for reduced obligations is an arbitrary benchmark that disregards market conditions or the typical profiles of industry players;
- Proposed implementation timeline: extended delays for many operators, including SMEs and maritime transport;
- Only some prevention, mitigation and clean-up processes and equipment are made binding for all operators with the vast majority of preventative steps left optional for operators to pick, when all operators should be submitted to the same binding requirements.

- Lack of comprehensive reporting and transparency:
 - Only requiring operators to keep internal records of estimated losses and to report spills when they pose a *significant* threat to human health or the environment, with no uniform reporting of spills and a complete exclusion for shippers and maritime spills;
 - Excluding annual reporting of routine spills and the total quantities of plastic pellets handled, which means there is no baseline data, making it impossible to evaluate the regulations effectiveness;
 - Exemptions in the public's access to information appears to prioritize business confidentiality and administrative convenience over genuine transparency or accountability.

“ The Council appears to recognize the importance of a concrete and comprehensive supply chain approach, extending the scope of the regulation to include maritime transport and smaller companies. However, achieving the stated goal of reducing pellet losses by up to 74% requires concrete and mandatory minimum requirements for all pellet-handling companies. Without robust external and independent control, effective implementation is at serious risk.

Another pressing concern is the extended implementation delays. Every postponed measure raises the risks of prolonging the damage to the EU environment and citizens livelihoods.” **Lucie Padovani, Marine Litter Lobbying Officer at Surfrider Foundation Europe.**

“SMEs account for more than 90% of the plastics supply chain, and ensuring that all workers handling pellets know that they are microplastics with a significant environmental impact is the key to ending chronic spills. MEPs understood this and adopted amendments to label pellet containers and impose robust packaging requirements, but Council ministers have dismissed these essential labelling provisions and restricted staff training programmes to bigger businesses. Trilogue negotiations must address these gaps and empower all economic actors in the chain towards meaningful action with harmonised prevention tools.”

Frédérique Mongodin, Senior Marine Litter Policy Officer at Seas At Risk.

“The Council's position is fundamentally flawed due to its lack of willingness to meaningfully address how pervasive and frequent plastic pellet spills are in the supply chain. By exempting small operators and imposing only limited reporting obligations, the proposal effectively guarantees continued pollution rather than preventing it. A meaningful regulation must be rooted in an accurate assessment of the scale of spills, mandatory coverage for all operators, and immediate, enforceable spill-prevention standards. Otherwise, this policy risks becoming yet another missed opportunity in the fight against microplastic pollution.” **Amy Youngman, Legal and Policy Specialist at Environmental Investigation Agency.**

Notes to the Editor :

- Plastic production pellets, around five millimeters in size, are the building blocks of all larger plastics and constitute the third largest source of microplastic pollution in the EU. These pellets are known to accumulate

especially in the aquatic and marine environment, where they have significant negative impacts on wildlife and ecosystems.

- Plastic pellet pollution occurs across all stages of the supply chain in the EU ([Plastic Giants report](#) & [Plastic Pellet value chain visual](#)).
- It is estimated that as many as 184,290 tonnes of pellets are lost in Europe every year. ([Impact assessment report from the European Commission](#)).
- The exponential expansion of the production of raw plastic materials since 2005 has resulted in increased waste generation and over 170 trillion plastic particles in the world's oceans. ([TINY PLASTIC, BIG PROBLEM. THE CASE FOR PREVENTING PELLET POLLUTION.](#))
- On October, 2023, The European Commission presented its [proposal for a or a Regulation on preventing pellet losses to reduce microplastic pollution](#).
- On April 23 2024, the European Parliament adopted [its position on the text](#) which included binding minimum requirements for all carriers and operators, with an expanded scope that includes maritime shipping but the MEPs missed the opportunity to tighten the regulation by choosing to exempt businesses that handle more than 1,000 tonnes of pellets a year from mandatory certification, audits and staff training. Still, the text made a significant improvement from the European Commission's initial voluntary prevention measures as well as any prior [industry-led voluntary initiatives](#).
- Last winter [pellet spill on the Galician coast](#) showed firsthand how poor pellet transportation at sea can have catastrophic consequences. This, combined with mounting [research linking microplastic contamination to human health risks](#), and a [petition](#) supported by over 90,000 Europeans, activated parliamentarians who voted 538 to 32 in favour of adoption of binding rules, seizing a last opportunity to protect the planet and people from harmful and toxic pellet pollution.

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