



## EU countries have to drastically reduce consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags

In view of tackling resource waste and littering, EU governments have until 27 November 2016 to adopt measures to cut the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags, and inform the European Commission about it. This is required by the [EU Plastic Bags Directive](#). It obliges Member States to achieve this by putting a price on plastic bags, and/or introducing national reduction targets.

National governments can choose from among a number of measures to achieve the commonly agreed objectives. These include economic instruments, such as charges or levies. Another option is national reduction targets: Member States must ensure that by the end of 2019 no more than 90 of these bags are consumed per person a year. By the end of 2025 that number should be down to no more than 40 bags per person. Both options may be achieved either through compulsory measures or agreements with economic sectors. It is also possible to ban bags provided those bans are in line with EU law.

EU Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries **Karmenu Vella** said: "*In the EU we currently consume up to 200 bags per person, every year. Only about 7 % are recycled. Billions end up as litter across Europe, especially on our beaches and in the sea. This has serious environmental and economic effects. We need to tackle marine pollution, in particular microplastics. We need to save resources and move to a circular economy. Now it's up to the Member States to do their part. Some have already shown that simple measures can lead to big changes.*"

In many EU countries plastic bags are no longer available at grocery stores for free. Some Member States, such as **Denmark, Finland and Luxembourg**, have already achieved great results. In **Ireland**, for example, since the introduction of the levy in 2002, the consumption of single-use plastic bags has decreased from 328 per person per year to just 18 – a reduction of nearly 95 %. **The UK** and **the Netherlands** have also brought in charges on bags. Here too a small charge proved to be equally effective. Some countries have opted for mandatory charges, others for voluntary agreements with the retail sector, such as **Germany, France and Italy**, in turn, have decided to ban plastic bags, apart from those that are biodegradable and compostable.

The European Commission is developing a common methodology for calculating how many lightweight bags are consumed per year. EU Member States must report annual consumption figures to the Commission as of 27 May 2018.

### Background

Approximately 100 billion plastic bags are consumed in the EU every year. Plastic carrier bags easily escape waste management streams and accumulate in our environment, especially in the form of marine litter. Once discarded into the environment, plastic bags can last for over 100 years. In the

sea, they have a devastating effect on marine life that get entangled in plastic debris or ingest it in the form of microplastics.

To tackle the problems of resource waste and littering, the EU passed a law in 2015 to help Member States drastically cut light-weight plastic bag consumption, focusing on all plastic carrier bags below thickness of 50 microns. Very lightweight bags (less than 15 microns and used for wrapping of loose food (e.g. fruit, vegetables, fish) may be exempted if this helps to prevent food wastage.