



Plastics Strategy – contribution of bio-based plastics to a sustainable, circular plastics economy

On 16 January 2018, the European Commission published its Communication ‘A European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy’. With this proposal the Commission aims to take an ambitious step towards making the European plastics system more resource-efficient and driving the change from a linear to a circular system. Bio-based materials provide crucial innovative solutions for the development of a sustainable, circular plastics economy by using alternative feedstocks.

The European Bioeconomy Alliance (EUBA) calls on the European Parliament and the Council of the EU to underpin the Commission's approach with concrete actions on how to realise the potential of bio-based plastics to contribute to driving innovation and sustainable development of the plastics industry.

USING BIO-BASED FEEDSTOCK FOR THE PRODUCTION OF PLASTICS

Increasing recycled content in plastics is an important way to reduce dependence on virgin fossil carbon resources. However, alternative feedstocks, such as bio-based and renewable, should also be encouraged in order to decrease the dependency of the plastics industry on finite fossil carbon resources, and the future demand should be met by the most sustainable options available. EUBA believes that bio-based resources, underpinned by sound life-cycle assessments (e.g. Single Market for Green Products Initiative), can contribute greatly to the transition towards a low carbon circular bioeconomy. Bio-based plastics act as a carbon stock, storing renewable carbon in the material throughout the product's life span, enabling the carbon to be recycled at the end of a products' life. This benefit is amplified when bio-based products are designed for reuse or recyclability.

The Commission's Communication acknowledges potential benefits of alternative feedstocks for the production of plastics. The Joint Research Center (JRC) has been tasked with conducting a survey to assess the life-cycle impact of diverse feedstock types.¹ EUBA welcomes this research initiative as an opportunity to provide evidence for future measures to promote the use of bio-based feedstock in diverse market sectors, for example packaging. However, the Commission's proposal lacks potential actions based on the results of the JRC project – similar to those, which have been suggested for fossil-based recyclates.

EUBA urges the Parliament and the Council to underpin the Commission's suggestions with a set of concrete measures to promote the use of bio-based feedstocks for the production of plastics.

¹ The assessment is expected to follow the Product Environmental Footprint methodology. In this context, EUBA urges that comparability needs to be ensured and that all feedstocks scrutinised need to be assessed according to the same methodology.



Measures to further the use of bio-based and renewable feedstock for plastics:

Potential measures at EU level:

- Promote the use of bio-based materials for the manufacture of packaging (building on recitals 3c and 3d of the provisional agreement for a revised EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (94/62/EC)) in future legislative initiatives;
- Work towards new, harmonised rules to ensure that by 2030 10% of all plastic packaging materials placed on the EU market is bio-based;
- Ensure that sustainability assessments for plastics feedstock (both fossil carbon and bio-based) are on a level playing field;
- Launch an EU wide pledging exercise to boost uptake of bio-based content with incentives to reward first movers;
- Favour bio-based materials in public procurement;
- Develop support / investment programme for biorefinery innovative technologies (R&D, pilot and flagship) to facilitate the bioeconomy as a whole and consequently also the bio-based plastics sector;
- Assess sustainability and availability of different bio-based feedstocks by taking into account existing national and EU legislations and provide strategic guidance on their efficient usages to facilitate access to sustainable feedstock for the bio-based industry in Europe.

Potential measures at national and regional level:

- Establish consumer information programmes about sustainably produced EU biomass, bio-based materials (for example bio-based plastics) technology, benefits and corresponding applications, emphasizing the added value that these products will bring to EU rural economy.

Potential industry-relevant measures:

- Take on voluntary commitments to increase bio-based content of plastics in products
- Promote further dialogue and cooperation along the value chain.

These measures will facilitate the transition to a low-carbon, bio-based circular economy. They can furthermore boost competitiveness and provide new revenue streams to European farmers and forest owners, by connecting primary producers, and by facilitating the biorefinery infrastructure uptake across Europe. Ultimately, the sound consideration of bio-based feedstocks within the Plastics Strategy is a key aspect to a future thriving bio-based, circular economy.²

² For a broader cross-sector approach, see EUBA's policy asks for a circular bioeconomy, 2017: <http://www.bioeconomyalliance.eu/sites/default/files/EUBA%20policy%20asks%20EN%20final.pdf>



European
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ABOUT EUROPEAN BIOECONOMY ALLIANCE

The European Bioeconomy Alliance (EUBA) is an alliance of leading European organisations representing sectors active in the bioeconomy – agriculture, forestry, biotechnology, sugar, starch, vegetable oils, pulp and paper, bioplastics, renewable ethanol, and research & innovation.

