



**COUNCIL OF
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NOTE

from: General Secretariat
to: delegations

Subject: Future steps at EU level to reduce use of plastic carrier bags
– Information from the Italian and Austrian delegations

Attached is an information note from the Italian and Austrian delegations on the above subject, to be raised under other business at the Environment Council meeting on 19 December 2011.

**Future steps at EU level to reduce use of plastic carrier bags
– Note from the Italian and Austrian delegations –**

Austrian initiative at the Environment Council meeting in March 2011

At the Environment Council meeting on 14 March 2011, Austria initiated a debate on use of plastic carrier bags. In particular, it called on the Commission to assess existing regulations on plastic bags in individual Member States and consider what steps might be taken at European level to reduce use of them. In replying to the Austrian document, the Commission made the point that the present pattern of plastic bag use was no longer sustainable and said it intended to set in hand an in-depth study of the matter. One possible outcome of that study might thus be a review of Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste.

Following the Council meeting, the European Commission launched a public consultation exercise on the issue in May 2011.

European Commission public consultation exercise

The European Commission asked all stakeholders for their views on the potential environmental, social and economic impact of measures to reduce use of plastic carrier bags and of measures to improve the biodegradability requirements of Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste and consumer visibility of biodegradable packaging products. The consultation exercise was completed in early September 2011.

According to figures published by the Commission, out of a total of 15 538 replies received, 96,9 % came from members of the public. Over 78 % of respondents were in favour of adopting Community measures to reduce use of plastic bags. Some 75 % thought that setting waste-prevention targets for plastic bags would significantly reduce use of them. More than 71 % thought that waste-prevention targets for plastic bags should be set at European level. Over 70 % saw a need for a European ban on plastic bags. Only 12 % thought that the present compostability and biodegradability requirements under the Packaging Directive were appropriate, while 76 % came out in favour of introducing a mandatory EU labelling or marking system to increase consumer visibility of biodegradable packaging products.

Possible EU action

The remarkable number of replies from the public and their strong support for action at Community level show both an extensive awareness among European public opinion of the adverse environmental impact of plastic bags and a considerable public interest in legislating for a drastic cutback in use of them.

Italy and Austria therefore call on the Commission to brief the Council on how and when it means to act on the outcome of the public consultation exercise. In particular, they would like the Commission to make clear its intention of reviewing and, if appropriate, amending the relevant provisions of the Packaging Directive and to give some idea of when a proposal will be submitted.

