

A World Without Plastic Straws

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How about other plastics?

Everyone is aware that Starbucks is eliminating plastic straws in lieu of sippy cups. I support this move because if my grand kids can do it then so can I. And yes, now McDonalds and even Buckingham Place are eliminating plastic straws. Less known is last week's European Parliament's recommendations on plastics. Here are five top lines to new legislation that will be voted on in September¹ as cited by BioPlastics News²:

- A ban on microplastics in cosmetics, personal care, detergents and cleaning products by 2020.
- A complete ban on oxo-degradable plastics – a source of microplastic pollution by 2020.
- A recognition that biodegradable and compostable plastics do not prevent plastic waste in our oceans and should not be an excuse to keep using single-use plastics.
- Any taxation of plastics should go towards preventing plastic waste generation.
- The reduction of hazardous substances in plastics, to ensure that what is recycled is free from dangerous chemicals.

These new points are part of the strategy to eliminate plastic pollution in the ocean³. This new trend seems to eliminate any potential for biotic degradation either through pro-oxidant induced biodegradation or via biodegradable plastics such as PHA. However, this biodegradation may help eliminate harmful plastics and microplastics that exist in our oceans since our current plastics do not degrade but erode in the environment⁴.



The outcome seems to initially force industry into wood products, glass or metal. This outcome is not necessarily good as typically glass and metal manufacturing produce higher GHG. One might ask the following questions:

- When pollution occurs, are biodegrade plastics better than non-biodegradable plastics?
- Are higher GHG for glass or metal less important than plastic pollution? Do better solutions exist?
- With recycling about 15% of produced plastic, are we ready for a circular economy? What else must change?

We must learn as we go forward. One interesting experiment is being conducted by New Zealand supermarket, Countdown, who is creating a plastic's free shopping aisle⁵. This is a learning environment where businesses and consumers can collectively engage to determine the best outcomes. Let's hope for others to continue the learning process in what will be a continually changing and learning environment in our future sustainable world.

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¹ <http://eeb.org/eu-parliament-backs-microplastic-bans-to-tackle-plastic-pollution/>

² <https://bioplasticsnews.com/2018/07/11/european-parliament-decision-biodegradable-and-compostable-plastics/>

³ <http://eeb.org/eu-parliament-backs-microplastic-bans-to-tackle-plastic-pollution/>

⁴ <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/08/ocean-life-eats-plastic-larvaceans-anchovy-environment/>

⁵ <http://www.packagingnews.com.au/sustainability/nz-supermarket-plans-plastic-free-aisle>