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Answer given by Ms Roswall
on behalf of the European Commission
(8.5.2025)

The Commission is aware of the study by its Joint Research Centre revealing that the deepest point of the Mediterranean Sea has a very high concentration of marine litter¹.

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive² requires Member States to monitor and assess quantities and impacts of marine litter and take measures to reduce them so that they do not harm the coastal and marine environment. Under this Directive, there is an agreed limit of 20 macro litter items per 100 metres of coastline³; threshold values for seafloor macro litter are being discussed with Member States.

In addition, the EU Strategy for Plastics⁴, the Single-Use Plastics Directive⁵ and the Port Reception Facilities Directive⁶ also aim to reduce marine litter from land and sea sources. The Regulation on preventing plastic pellets losses to reduce microplastic pollution⁷ proposed by the Commission in October 2023 will strengthen the legislative framework.

The Zero Pollution Action Plan⁸ sets a 50% reduction target for plastic litter at sea by 2030. According to the recent monitoring and outlook report⁹ the EU is on track to meet the target.

The Extended Producer Responsibility provisions are embodied in EU legislation, including the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation¹⁰, to ensure that producers contribute to this goal. The EU also supports regional organisations¹¹, to combat marine litter and developing an ambitious global Treaty against plastic pollution.

EU funds, such as Horizon Europe¹², the EU programme for the environment and climate

¹ 26 715 items/km2, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0025326X25000852#bb0640>

² Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy, OJ L 164, 25.6.2008, p. 19–40.

³ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/marine-environment/descriptors-under-marine-strategy-framework-directive_en

Communication from the Commission – Commission Notice on the threshold values set under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive 2008/56/EC and Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848, C/2024/1268, OJ C, C/2024/2078, 11.3.2024.

⁴ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/plastics-strategy_en

⁵ Directive (EU) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment, , OJ L 155, 12.6.2019, p. 1–19.

⁶ Directive (EU) 2019/883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on port reception facilities for the delivery of waste from ships, amending Directive 2010/65/EU and repealing Directive 2000/59/EC, OJ L 151, 7.6.2019, p. 116–142.

⁷ Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on preventing plastic pellet losses to reduce microplastic pollution, COM/2023/645 final.

⁸ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/zero-pollution-action-plan_en

⁹ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/zero-pollution-action-plan/zero-pollution-targets_en#:~:text=The%20Zero%20Pollution%20Monitoring%20and%20Outlook%20offers%20a,are%20likely%20to%20achieve%202030%20zero%20pollution%20targets

¹⁰ Regulation (EU) 2025/40 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 December 2024 on packaging and packaging waste, amending Regulation (EU) 2019/1020 and Directive (EU) 2019/904, and repealing Directive 94/62/EC, OJ L, 2025/40, 22.1.2025.

¹¹ E.g. Barcelona Convention in the Mediterranean.

action¹³, and the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture fund¹⁴ finance activities against marine litter.

These measures can be effective: a recent report showing that marine litter on the EU coastline is down by almost one-third¹⁵.

¹² https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en; https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en

¹³ LIFE: Regulation (EU) 2021/783 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 establishing a Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE), and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1293/2013, OJ L 172, 17.05.2021, p.53.

¹⁴ https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/funding/emfaf_en

¹⁵ https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/marine-litter-eu-coastline-down-almost-one-third-2025-02-04_en