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**White paper for  
an ocean  
free from  
plastic  
bottles**



The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problems.

*Mahatma Gandhi*

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Reusable bottles can make the difference



# Introduction

Plastic bottles, that best-selling consumer item, are designed for a single use, and to be discarded once their contents have been emptied. Used daily, mainly outdoors, plastic bottles all too often end up in the environment, where they become a real scourge, notably for aquatic flora and fauna.

Plastic bottles, and their caps, feature in the top ten categories of litter most frequently encountered along coastlines, in the marine environment and in rivers. Faced with this scourge, Surfrider Foundation Europe has launched the campaign ***Reset Your Habits*** to raise awareness, mobilise and reach out to all to reduce, at source, pollution caused by plastic bottles.

***Reset Your Habits*** is calling for broad and deep societal and behavioural changes, where we modify our consumption and production habits in order to limit our ecological impact. This means replacing disposable plastic bottles with reusable, sustainable alternatives.

This campaign has also been devised to help citizens embracing the concept of the circular economy that should be applied over the entire lifecycle of plastic bottles, from design to disposal.

***Reset Your Habits*** focuses on disposable water bottles since they account for most of the waste bottles found, even though drinking water from the tap is easily accessible in the European Union.

The massive pollution caused by plastic items needs to be met with global, urgent and effective action. The European Union can act as a leader in this fight, by means of its Strategy on Plastics in Circular Economy, if sufficiently ambitious and binding. Specifically, the EU should call on Member States to adopt concrete measures to counter plastic waste at source. The discontinuance of disposable plastic items, including bottles, would be an action on a par with the considerable threat posed by plastic containers.

This ***White Paper for an Ocean free from Plastic Bottles***, written to the intention of the European Union and its Member States, groups some, but not all, of Surfrider Foundation Europe’s recommendations to limit the number of plastic bottles ending up in the environment.

# Summary of recommendations

## 1. Improve the eco-design of plastic bottles

- Run an awareness and information campaign to the intention of consumers on the issue of eco-design.
- Optimise eco-design and the sustainable production of plastic bottles.
- Impose an environmental impact and sustainability study prior to authorising the commercialisation of new products.

## 2. Reduce the production of plastic bottles

- Dialogue with industrial stakeholders to come up with new policies to produce water bottles by focusing on large containers (1 L and more).
- Ban the production of plastic water bottles containing less than 50 cL.

## 3. Reduce the distribution of plastic bottles

- Encourage public institutions to stop using disposable plastic containers for drinking water (bottles and cups) by 2020, replacing them with reusable alternatives.
- Put in place tax initiatives to encourage distributors to limit the sale of disposable plastic bottles, preferring instead to sell reusable containers.
- Encourage the installation of water fountains in stores and at festive and sporting events.
- Ban the use of plastic water bottles in cafés, hotels and restaurants, to be replaced by returnable bottles and jugs.

## 4. Reduce the consumption of plastic bottles

- Inform and educate as to the pollution caused by plastic bottles, and the potential negative health effects and run campaigns to the intention of the general public during World Water Day or during the European Week for Waste Reduction.
- Encourage reusable alternatives and public water fountains during special events (bicentenary of the Wallace fountains), major sporting events (Olympic Games, French Tennis Open, etc.), and in schools.
- Support and guarantee the provision of good-quality tap water in the EU, by making these principles part of the EU Drinking Water Directive.

## 5. Improve the end-of-life management of plastic bottles

- Inform, reach out and educate to raise the awareness of the general public as to sorting, collecting, deposit-return systems and recycling waste.
- Set a binding target of 100% of plastic bottles recycled by 2030.
- Reinforce, at EU level, the extended responsibility of the concerned economic stakeholders (manufacturers, distributors and importers) by promoting a system of Extended Producer Responsibility channels for plastic packaging, including bottles.



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**Surfrider  
Foundation  
Europe:  
27 years  
combating  
Marine Litter**

## Rise above plastics campaigns

Every year, between 10 and 15 million tonnes of waste end up in the ocean, of which 60% to 90% is comprised of plastic waste<sup>1</sup>, a figure on the constant increase since a direct reflection of our production and consumer modes, where plastic occupies a preponderant and growing position. To see this, one need only consider that the global production of plastic grew from 1.5 tonnes per year in 1950 to 322 tonnes per year in 2015<sup>2</sup>.

Under the combined effects of ultraviolet radiation and the mechanical abrasion of sea waves, plastic waste breaks up and decomposes<sup>3</sup> into micro- or nanoplastics, depending on their size<sup>4</sup>. These have seriously negative impacts on marine organisms who swallow them and can die of asphyxiation or intestinal obstruction. As things stand, uncertainties exist as to the impact, on the environment and on humans and animals, of chemical elements adsorbed and released by plastic waste. For example, it has been proven that micro-plastics attract and absorb persistent organic pollutants (POP), already present in the environment, such as PCBs and DDT. Scientific research at the University of Tokyo has shown that some POPs were to be found in seabird tissue after they had swallowed micro-plastics carrying these pollutants. As a result, scientists are concerned that, in the future, POPs could end up in the food chain. A recent report prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) listed 121 species of seafood readily available on sale that ingest micro-plastics<sup>5</sup>.

Faced with this plight, Surfrider Foundation Europe (SFE) has, for 27 years now, been active in about a dozen European countries, supported by over 120,000 volunteers, working together to preserve oceans and coastlines, and reduce plastic waste.

The NGO has been particularly active in major awareness and mobilisation campaigns such as *Ban the Bag* (against disposable plastic bags) and *Beat the Microbead* (against micro-plastics found in cosmetics, cleaning and healthcare products). Surfrider Foundation Europe also develops its expertise regarding the origin and nature of marine litter by running participatory science and scientific programs such as the Ocean Initiatives program, sponsored by the European Commission in 2013, the Riverine Input programme and a network to monitor waste on beach thanks to the implementation of the OSPAR Convention (OSPAR, Marine Strategy Framework Directive).

In order to consolidate its actions, Surfrider Foundation Europe joined forces with about 100 organisations involved in the “Break Free from Plastic” international movement, doing so right from when the movement was founded in 2016. SFE co-founded the “Rethink Plastic” EU alliance to incite EU institutions to take concrete measures for a future with no plastic pollution.

## 2017 : A new Reset Your Habits campaign

In 2017, Surfrider Foundation Europe has been focusing on disposable plastic bottles. A symptom of mass consumption and over-packaging, plastic bottles, originally containing water or other drinks, and their tops, are amongst the top 10 items that end up on our coastline and in the aquatic environment. 20,000 plastic bottles are collected each year as part of the Ocean Initiatives programs<sup>6</sup> alone.

Building on this alarming status code, Surfrider Foundation Europe decided to launch a new campaign: “*Reset Your Habits: reusable bottles can make the difference*”, a campaign designed to raise awareness, mobilise and reach out to all to reduce, at source, the pollution caused by plastic bottles. The purpose of the campaign is to prevent new plastic items from entering the environment by initiating broad and deep societal and behavioural change, with disposables discontinued to the benefit of reusables. In particular, the campaign focuses on water bottles since they account for most of the plastic waste ending up in our rivers, along our coastlines and in aquatic environments. In Europe, 55 billion litres of bottled water are consumed on average each year<sup>7</sup>, corresponding to almost 1 million tonnes of plastic. All this waste could be avoided by means of a reusable water bottle.

*Reset Your Habits* is about rethinking the entire lifecycle of plastic water bottles from eco-design to end-of-life management. The circular economy can serve as a mean to unburden ourselves of a linear economic model based on the extraction of raw materials, followed by the production of an item and then its disposal, to embrace instead a virtuous cycle, based on an optimisation of resources and raw materials, and including eco-design and recycling.

## Action levers of the campaign

### Awareness

Inform the public as to the problems caused by plastic bottle pollution.

### Mobilisation

Get people to change their behaviour so as to reduce the use of plastic bottles and embrace sustainable alternatives.

### Lobby

Have more stringent regulations and engage in advocacy at national and EU level to reduce plastic bottles at source, establish dialogue with drinks industrialists (manufacturers and distributors) and encourage reusable and sustainable alternatives.

<sup>1</sup> Barnes et al., 2009; Thompson et al., 2004; Ryan et al., 2009

<sup>2</sup> PlasticsEurope

<sup>3</sup> Cózar et al., 2014

<sup>4</sup> Microplastics, which are pieces of plastic less than 5 mm in size, can also be introduced directly into the marine environment, for example, through wastewater networks in the case of fibres from clothing.

<sup>5</sup> FAO, *Microplastics in fisheries and aquaculture Status of knowledge on their occurrence and implications for aquatic organisms and food safety*, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7677e.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Based on report forms completed, Environmental Report of the Ocean Initiatives of Surfrider Foundation Europe :

[www.oceaninitiatives.org/en/resources/reports](http://www.oceaninitiatives.org/en/resources/reports)

<sup>7</sup> Report on Natural and Sparkling Mineral Water – European Federation of Bottled Waters, 2016, [www.efbw.org](http://www.efbw.org)

# Surfrider is calling out...

This White Paper sets out a number of action levers and concrete measures to prevent new plastic bottles from entering the ocean. The Paper outlines the challenges of the ***Reset Your Habits*** campaign targeting plastic bottles, and suggests a number of solutions and actions to mitigate plastic pollution at source.

The Paper concerns mainly plastic water bottles, since these predominate consumption and waste volume. The recommendations made are however valid for all disposable bottles made from polyethylene terephthalate (PET).

At international level, one notes an increasing awareness of marine pollution caused by plastic, as can be seen in particular from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14 ("Conserve and Sustainably Use the Oceans, Seas and Marine Resources")<sup>8</sup> and the G7<sup>9</sup> and G20<sup>10</sup> Action Plans on Marine Litter.

At EU level, the (Marine Strategy Framework Directive (Directive 2008/57/EC) acknowledges marine litter as a qualitative descriptor of the environmental status of marine waters.

Currently, the European Union is finalising its «Strategy on Plastics in a Circular Economy», which is an opportunity to revise its targets upwards and adopt concrete actions for the reduction of marine litter.

Citizens, industrialists and politicians, we all have a role to play in getting plastic bottles out of our environment, by refusing single-use packaging, and by rethinking its design, production method, consumption and end-of-life management.

<sup>8</sup> 2030 Sustainable Development Program of the United Nation (UN General Assembly Resolution, 25 September 2015)

<sup>9</sup> Action Plan to Combat Marine Litter – G7 Summit, 7–8 June 2015

<sup>10</sup> Action Plan on Marine Litter – G20 Summit, 8 July 2017 Hamburg 2017

## 1. Surfrider is calling out decision makers and economic stakeholders to improve the eco-design of plastic bottles.

To ensure an environmentally responsible packaging of bottled water, industrialists and public authorities must work together to market eco-designed bottles made using materials and production methods that are more environmentally friendly and meet the requirements of a circular economy.

## 2. Surfrider is calling out decision makers and industrialists to reduce the production of plastic bottles.

The bottled water industry offers a disproportionate range of plastic packaging varying in size, density and material, even though a single reusable packaging would suffice. This packaging, accounting for 80% to 90% of the price of the product, is a source of profit for the bottled water industry, to the detriment of the consumer and the environment that suffer the harmful consequences.

## 3. Surfrider is calling out public and private bodies to face up to their environmental responsibility in order to reduce the distribution of plastic bottles.

We are here referring to distribution in the broad sense: distribution done by public institutions and private companies that provide plastic bottles inside their establishments, and by supermarkets packed to the rafters with plastic bottles. Plastic bottles cannot continue as the preferred means to meet our need for hydration, be this indoors or outdoors, given that alternative means of providing water exist.

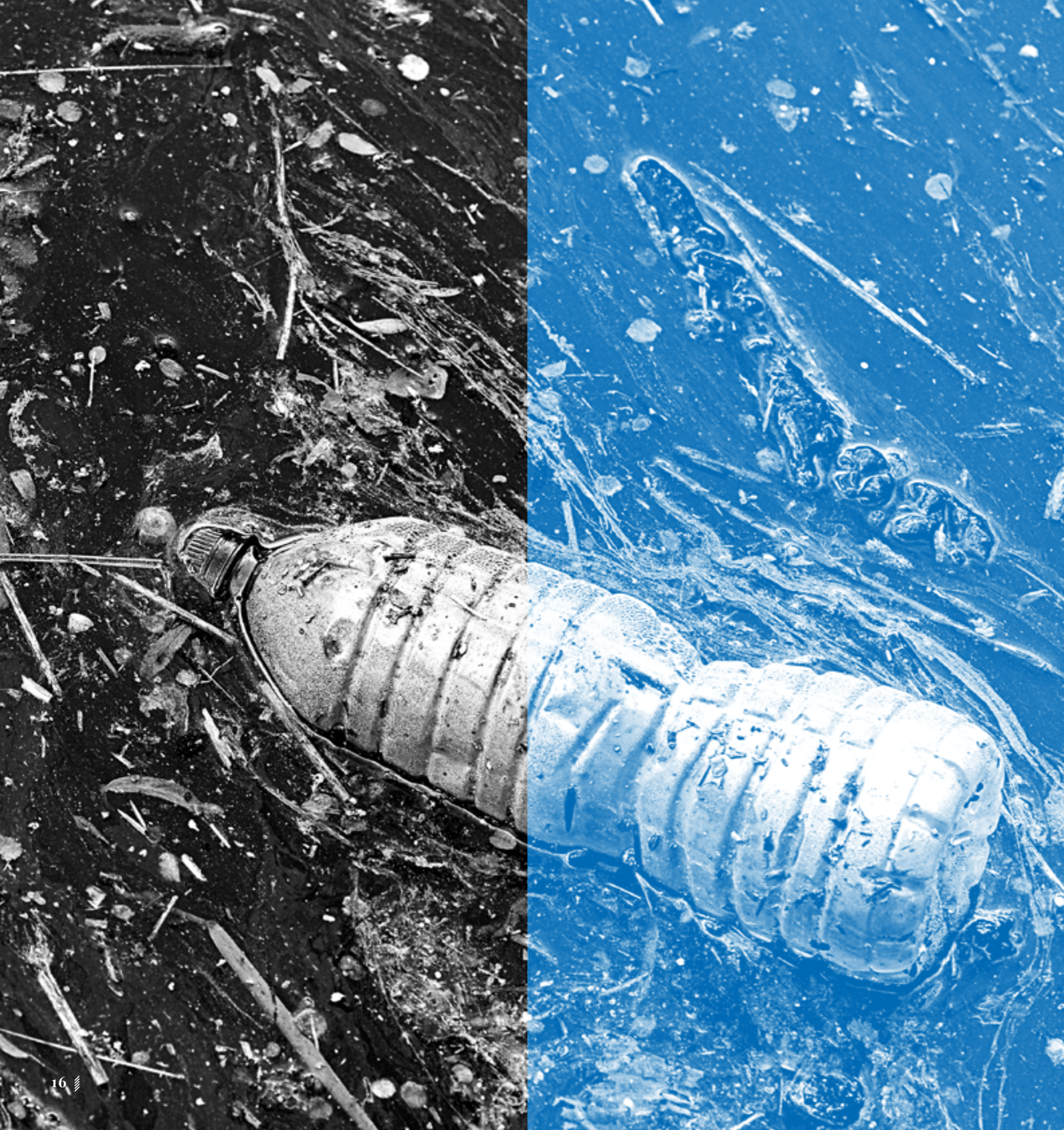
## 4. Surfrider is calling out consumers to reduce their use of plastic bottles.

The consumer has a key role to play in the fight against plastic waste. By adopting eco-responsible consumption habits, the consumer can opt to replace single-use plastic packaging with a wide range of reusable and sustainable alternatives such as reusable water bottles and water fountains.

## 5. Surfrider is calling out consumers, public authorities and industrialists to improve the end-of-life management of plastic bottles.

Just because a product can be recycled doesn't mean that it *actually* is recycled. In fact, only 59% of the bottles are collected in EU for recycling<sup>11</sup> even though, since most are made of PET, they should all be recycled. We must now take measures to improve general-public information, collection, sorting, deposit-return and recycling systems to prevent these bottles from ending up in the environment.

<sup>11</sup> "Nearly 59% of all bottles placed in the European market have been collected for recycling in 2015" – PCI Wood Mackenzie Annual Report on postconsumer polyethylene terephthalate (PET) collection and recycling in Europe, 2016



**How can we  
prevent more  
plastic bottles  
from ending up  
in the ocean?**

# 1.

## Improve the eco-design of plastic bottles

The path that sees water get from the source to the end-consumer should not be made of plastic. Preventing pollution from plastic bottles in the ocean does not mean drinking less water; rather, it means rethinking and reducing the plastic packaging that is causing environmental damage. The ***Reset Your Habits*** campaign is calling on industrialists to embrace a circular economy in order to rethink how water is bottled, and on public authorities to support this new economic model.

The goal of a circular economy is to break free from the linear production model that consists in extracting raw materials, manufacturing, consuming and then discarding, in order to adopt a virtuous cycle of value creation. Inspired by natural ecosystems, this

new model is based on the efficient use of natural resources with a positive environmental, economic and social impact. This is reflected in particular by an extension of material flows (reuse, recycling) and of the product's life cycle (eco-design, repair, reuse, recycling).

Reducing bottle waste means first and foremost rethinking water packaging, questioning its usefulness and favouring an eco-design based on a greener choice of materials and design, as well as on reuse and sustainable transport of the product.



## Proposals of Surfrider Foundation Europe

### The main drivers of change

- Public Authorities
- Enterprises
- Consumers

### Run an awareness and information campaign to the intention of consumers on the issue of eco-design

The environmental impact of a product from production to final consumer is a criterion for sensitised and committed consumers. However, the lack of clarity and information about this criterion is preventing its widespread use. If citizens are to make an informed choice, they must have clear information as to the nature of the product, its means of production and impact on the environment (natural resources, energy efficiency), its transportation and end-of-life management (reuse, deposit-return system, recycling). Information is an essential requirement for the development of eco-responsible consumption, a driver of the ecological transition.

To this end, public institutions, producers and distributors should run information and awareness campaigns to inform citizens as to the positive, ecological, economic and social impacts of eco-design. This means boosting the promotion of EU Ecolabels, so that consumers find it easier to identify responsible products.

### Optimise eco-design and the sustainable production of plastic bottles

Eco-design, in a circular economy, means to design products with limited impact throughout their life cycle: raw material, usage, lifetime, repair, recycling and final treatment.

Inspired by biomimicry, «products are seen as flows of materials and energy that are reinjected into successive virtuous loops (organic or technical)»<sup>12</sup>.

PET plastic bottles, by the very nature of their material, are designed to be recycled. Nevertheless, they are not sustainable. Their effective duration of use, from a few minutes to a few hours depending on how long the consumer takes to empty their bottle pales into insignificance when one considers their durability, taking between 100 to 1000 years to decompose in the environment.

Thus, it is essential to optimise the eco-design of plastic bottles in order to reduce their impact on the environment: rethink their usefulness, their material, their duration of use, their recyclability. This also means not using toxic products so as to make it possible to reuse and recycle the product, and to use renewable energies.

We are calling on EU Member States, as part of the Circular Economy Package, to deploy sufficient resources to encourage the sustainable production of plastic bottles, in particular by setting up a framework to supervise innovation and proper recovery channels. The EU must do more to promote sustainable production (labels, awareness campaigns) and encourage the reuse of secondary raw materials, notably through tax incentives.

### Impose an environmental impact and sustainability study prior to authorising the commercialisation of new products

Faced with the growing development of new materials and products, and in order to avoid false solutions, the European Union should require that an environmental impact and sustainability study be carried out prior to the commercialisation of these new products, the results of which should determine whether or not a market authorisation for the new products is granted. The Member States should consider this study as an essential requirement in the public interest to protect the environment calling for an analysis of the product risks on the environment, doing so as part of the new extended producer responsibility stemming from the Circular Economy Package.

Green growth can offer solutions, but it is important to ensure that, under the guise of intentions to fight against waste pollution, new materials and products do not act as factors to provoke new or different risks, proven or potential, concerning other parameters of the ecosystem (biodiversity, environment, climate change).

<sup>12</sup><http://www.institut-economique-circulaire.fr>



# D

## Conclusion

To improve the eco-design of plastic bottles is to:

- Run an awareness and information campaign to the intention of consumers on the issue of eco-design.
- Optimise eco-design and the sustainable production of plastic bottles.
- Impose an environmental impact and sustainability study prior to authorising the commercialisation of new products.

## 2. Reduce the production of plastic bottles



Industrialists from the water and beverages sector meet in a consortium to develop a marketing strategy for plastic packaging, constantly renewed, diversified and multiplied. This runs against the current rising global awareness of marine pollution caused by plastic.

Water, essential for life, is the most consumed drink but once bottled, its container can become a major source of pollution though the packaging of the water may be necessary for its transport, this does not justify putting every single drop of water inside a plastic container.

To limit the production of waste associated with plastic bottles, we need to limit the production of plastic bottles themselves. This should start by discontinuing smaller volumes, where serious questions persist as to the purpose of their production given their very low level of utility and their strong impact on the marine environment.

## Proposals of Surfrider Foundation Europe

### The main drivers of change

- Public authorities
- Industrialists
- Consumers

### Dialogue with industrial stakeholders to come up with new policies to produce water bottles by focusing on large containers

In order to comply with the regulations in force, some manufacturers are making efforts to lighten their packaging and reduce the amount of plastic used. However, this remains insufficient to have overall effective results on the environment. For this to happen, we need to reduce the packaging itself. This implies discontinuing the production of smaller volumes (20 cL, 25 cL, 33 cL) to the benefit of large volumes (1 L and more), and making overall changes to how water is packaged.

We are looking to engage in constructive dialogue bringing together bottled water industrialists, manufacturers of alternatives, public authorities, civil society, and any other interested parties, to exchange ideas as to good practices and encourage the industry to modify and reduce their product ranges by focusing on eco-responsible packaging and spring water fountains.

### Ban the production of plastic water bottles containing less than 50 cL

We are calling on public authorities to embrace their environmental responsibility by banning plastic bottles that generate so much waste.

We are in favour of bringing in a ban on smaller bottle volumes (less than 50 cL) and of facilitating the provision of large volumes. This would require new regulations at local, regional or national level. At EU level, this ban could be part of:

- The EU Strategy to reduce Plastic Waste regarding the reduction of single-use plastics.
- A new directive specific to single-use plastics banning certain items such as small-volume plastic bottles, based on a model similar to the Directive 2015/720 regarding the reduction of consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags.
- The future review of the drinking water directive (Directive 98/83/EC)
- A new review of the Directive 2009/54/EC on the exploitation and marketing of natural mineral waters.

## Conclusion

### To reduce the production of plastic bottles is to:

- Dialogue with industrial stakeholders to come up with new policies to produce water bottles by focusing on large containers (1 L and more).
- Ban the production of plastic water bottles containing less than 50 cL.



# 3.

## Reduce the distribution of plastic bottles

Plastic bottles are an integral part of our personal and professional lives. They are distributed or sold to excess at the workplace, inside private and public institutions and at sporting, festive, or trade events, as well as in supermarkets.

However, given that eco-responsible alternatives exist, the economic actors and public authorities that distribute these polluting containers have a key role to play in reducing the distribution of plastic bottles.

We are urging them to switch to reusable containers (water bottles, reusable cups, water jugs, deposit-return system, etc.) and alternative modes of water distribution (water fountains, bulk formats).

International meetings bringing together thousands of influential players on the international scene such as the Conferences of Parties (COP), the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) and the G20 have chosen to switch from plastic bottles to reusable containers, in a gesture that proves that this transition is possible and indeed even appreciated by consumers.



## Proposals of Surfrider Foundation Europe



### The main drivers of change

- Public authorities
- Enterprises and Private Organisations
- Consumers

**Encourage public institutions to stop using disposable plastic containers for drinking water (bottles and cups) by 2020, replacing them with reusable alternatives.**

The *Reset Your Habits* campaign stresses the importance for public institutions and private companies, key players in the ecological transition, to set the example and show, to their employees and to the general public, the path leading to an eco-responsible society.

As part of the EU’s ecological transition, we are urging public institutions to discontinue, by no later than 2020, the free distribution or selling of plastic bottles, be this in the workplace or in the various events organised or sponsored by these institutions. Public authorities, in

their capacity as representatives, have to lead by example in reducing waste, and in particular, single-use plastics, including bottles. This implies using more sustainable water-distribution methods such as water jugs, water fountains and possibly glass bottles in beverage dispensers.

The European Commission, during the 2017 “Our Ocean” conference made a step in this direction by banning plastic cups inside its buildings<sup>93</sup>. However, the action could be more ambitious and effective by completely banning plastic bottles, as is already the case in Hamburg (Germany). Such commitments can be written into the internal rules of the institutions or be brought in by means of a charter of eco-responsible commitments. This approach should also be embraced by private companies as part of their social and environmental responsibility.

**Bring in tax initiatives to encourage distributors to limit the sale of single-use disposable plastic bottles, and to promote reusable containers.**

Plastic bottles have a high ecological cost that ought to be passed on to the product itself in order to heighten awareness of its real cost and environmental impact. Various types of tax incentives could provide an answer here: a tax on waste-generating products, a tax on luxury goods (bottled water costs almost 100 to 300 times more than water from the tap), a special VAT rate, or a fee paid to the municipality. The funds so collected could be used to finance access to water and enhance the quality of the drinking water.

To apply to single-use plastic bottles their real cost, including all of their external features, would also

<sup>93</sup> Commitments of the *Our Ocean* conference: <http://ourocean2017.org/our-ocean-commitments>



encourage setting up deposit-return systems to optimise the recovery of these items and prevent them from ending up in the environment.

In addition, financial incentives to use more durable and reusable containers instead of single-use packaging would be an efficient action lever to stimulate change in consumer habits.

**Encourage the installation of water fountains in stores and at festive and sporting events.**

Large-scale sports or leisure events typically mean large numbers of people consuming large quantities of water. However, this does not necessarily have to lead to a massive distribution of plastic bottles. The organisers should prioritise water-supply methods that are more eco-responsible, and raise the awareness of participants as to the matter of on-site waste.

We are urging the installation of deposit-return systems for reusable bottles and/or cups, as well as water points, and waste-collection and sorting systems (in particular bottles to be recycled) at all events. We are also recommending that participants be allowed to bring reusable containers with them into the event by making environmental requirements and security standards compatible.

These measures feature in the charters of eco-responsible events and in international certifications (ISO 20121) thus contributing to the positive impact of events (reduction of waste and of energy consumption) by means of eco-responsible management, which should be systematically applied.

Public places and areas (shopping centres, cinemas, performance venues), under their environmental

responsibility, should also bring in measures to reduce plastic bottles (water fountains, reusable cups, deposit-return system)

**Ban the use of plastic water bottles in bars, cafés, hotels and restaurants**

The drive to reduce waste and single-use plastic packaging also concerns the food sector, which includes bars, cafés, hotels and restaurants. Indeed, this particular service network distributes hundreds of litres of bottled water each day. Given that these establishments could set up a specific waste-collection system, they should replace single-use plastic bottles with jugs, filtered water or glass bottles. Regarding specifically the latter, a deposit-return system could be set up with the supplier, which would have an immediate and positive impact, both ecologically and economically. This would also stimulate the local economy. Such a system has already proven itself in Belgium, Germany and France.



**Conclusion**

**To reduce the distribution of plastic bottles is to:**

- Encourage public institutions to stop using disposable plastic containers for drinking water (bottles and cups) by 2020, replacing them with reusable alternatives.
- Bring in tax initiatives to encourage distributors to limit the sale of single-use disposable plastic bottles, and to promote reusable containers.
- Encourage the installation of water fountains in stores and at festive and sporting events.
- Ban the use of plastic water bottles in cafés, hotels and restaurants, to be replaced by returnable bottles and jugs

# 4.

## Reduce the consumption of plastic bottles



Cutting down on plastic bottles means reducing the consumption of single-use objects that generate waste. The bottled water industry offers a wide range of bottle volumes to meet the so-called “types of thirst” of consumers. In response, it should be possible for customers to refuse the packaging, used for branding purposes, in favour of its content, namely water or some other drink.

The *Reset Your Habits* campaign wants to see consumers become active players in their choice of consumption, and limit their ecological footprint by reducing the quantity of packaging they use. By thus modifying the demand, the consumer can modify the available offer, and stimulate the creation of products that are more environmentally friendly.

Public authorities have a role to play in promoting and supporting eco-responsible consumption. They should provide consumers with clear information on waste-generating products and their impacts, and make sustainable and accessible alternatives available to consumers. In the case of water bottles, this means promoting reusable containers, as well as facilitating access to good-quality drinking water in public places.

## Proposals of Surfrider Foundation Europe

### The main drivers of change

- Public authorities
- Consumers

### Inform and educate as to the pollution caused by plastic bottles

A change in consumer behaviour can only last if it is perceived as necessary by the consumer concerned. It is therefore essential to inform and educate people as to the growing pollution threat posed by plastic bottles.

The *Reset Your Habits* campaign provides the general public with communication and educational tools as well as awareness-raising activities in order to provide information on consumption, environmental impact and alternatives to plastic bottles.

This information role also falls to public authorities as part of the right to environmental information (Aarhus Convention 1998) and their responsibility to protect the environment (Article 11 Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union<sup>14</sup>). Concretely, this can mean running general public information and awareness campaigns in association with special events (World Water Day, The European Week for Waste Reduction), but also developing educational activities inside schools.

In addition, the European Union must prevent risks to human health caused by plastic. Under the effect of heat, there is a thermal degradation of plastics that release chemical agents such as Bisphenol A (BPA) and other phthalates, and endocrine disruptors recognised for the risks they pose, in particular to the human hormonal system. This involves identifying and having the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) formally acknowledge substances harmful to human health under the EU Regulation 1907/2006 concerning the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH), as it is the case for BPA<sup>15</sup>. In accordance with the precautionary principle, EU regulations must be strengthened to oblige manufacturers to review the composition of plastic bottles and to prevent the risks associated with the degradation of plastics.

### Promote alternative solutions

The omnipresence of plastic bottles on the market diverts the attention of consumers from many alternatives accessible to all, more durable and economic. *Reset Your Habits* is also

about a participatory communication campaign on social networks focussing on good practices and citizens who embrace these practices, such as water bottles reusable for life, and alternatives to the consumption of hundreds of bottles of plastic each year.

The campaign highlights these solutions and encourages public authorities to promote reusable containers, especially in schools and at large-scale sporting and festive events, such as the Olympic Games, major sports competitions and festivals.

Public authorities also have a major role to play in increasing the number of water fountains in public places and events (parks, squares, streets, train stations, etc.) with the aim of reducing this global phenomenon of dependence on disposable plastic water bottles. This need is widely echoed by citizens, as could be seen from the 2015 participatory budget for Paris.<sup>16</sup>

Another action could be a campaign to promote water fountains, for example, as part of the bicentenary of the Wallace Fountains in 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Article 11 (ex Article 6 TEC) : “Environmental protection requirements must be integrated into the definition and implementation of the Union’s policies and activities, in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development” »

<sup>15</sup> *MSC unanimously agrees that Bisphenol A is an endocrine disruptor*, ECHA/PR/17/12, Helsinki, 16 June 2017

<sup>16</sup> See winning project at the participatory budget of Paris 2015: [https://budgetparticipatif.paris.fr/bp/jsp/site/Portal.jsp?document\\_id=3036&portlet\\_id=171](https://budgetparticipatif.paris.fr/bp/jsp/site/Portal.jsp?document_id=3036&portlet_id=171)

Such actions could be stimulated through tax incentives.

**Support and guarantee the provision of good-quality tap water**

Promoting the use of water fountains and tap water implies giving a guarantee that it will always be of good quality. Even though drinking water is widely available in the EU, fears remain as to the quality of tap water. Therefore, it is up to public authorities to invest in water-purification systems that are ever more efficient and reassure people as to the consumption of tap water, which is just as good for the health as mineral water.

It is worth bearing in mind that the first successful European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) was the Right2Water Initiative, gathering, to date, 1,884,790 signatures around a key principle: “The Human Right to Water and Sanitation”.

In the same way as the citizens who signed the Right2Water Initiative and in view of the European Union’s obligation to respond to this civic movement by significantly amending the Directive 98/83/EC on drinking water, we are calling on the European Commission and the Member States to intensify their efforts to ensure universal access to water and sanitation. This is an essential prerequisite to human life and to a world without pollution caused by plastic bottles.



**Conclusion**

**To reduce the consumption of plastic bottles is to:**

- Inform and educate as to the pollution caused by plastic bottles, and the potentially negative health effects: run campaigns to the intention of the general public during World Water Day or during the European Week for Waste Reduction.
- Encourage reusable alternatives and public water fountains during special events (bicentenary of the Wallace fountains), major sporting events (Olympic Games, French Tennis Open, etc.), and in schools.
- Support and guarantee the provision of good-quality tap water in the EU, by making these principles part of the EU Drinking Water Directive.

5.

Improve the end-of-life management of plastic bottles

One million plastic bottles are purchased every minute in the world<sup>17</sup>, most of which will end up in the ocean, where they will need between 100 to 1000 years to decompose depending on the surrounding marine environment.

The single-use plastic bottle commonly used to transport and market water and other beverages is made of PET (polyethylene terephthalate), which is a 100% recyclable plastic. In theory, this recyclability meets the requirements of a circular economy, in that the plastic bottle is supposed to be collected and recycled after use, and then reinjected into other production circuits. However, a large number of plastic bottles are never recycled – most end up being burnt or in landfills.

The *Reset Your Habits* campaign is calling for the optimisation of waste management systems, in order to improve their end-of-life management, thanks to a thorough and collaborative work between distributors, accredited bodies, local authorities and citizens.

<sup>17</sup>The Guardian, *A million bottles a minute: world's plastic binge 'as dangerous as climate change'*, 28 June 2017



Proposals of Surfrider Foundation Europe

The main drivers of change

- Public authorities
- Enterprises
- Consumers

Inform, reach out and educate to raise the awareness of the general public as to sorting, collecting, deposit-return systems and recycling waste.

1 City waste (household and business) represents 10% of the waste produced in the European Union<sup>18</sup>, and citizens have a role to play in the treatment of their waste. The *Reset Your Habits* campaign reminds consumers of the need to reduce and reuse, but also to sort and return plastic bottles for recycling. These are simple eco-gestures that should become part of consumer habits to prevent these bottles from being thrown directly into the environment or cascaded by not being recycled.

In order to pass on the proper sorting gestures, and to enable each and all to understand how and why our

waste is treated, enterprises (waste producers), public institutions and other bodies in charge of waste management (eco-organisations, collectors, recyclers) should run awareness and education campaigns about waste sorting.

The purpose of these campaigns would be to enable citizens to properly interpret waste-sorting instructions, and understand the various phases of waste treatment (re-use, composting, recycling, incineration, landfill) and their ecological impacts. This would be particularly in line with the objectives of the European Union to improve the management of waste on its territory (Directive 2008/98/EC on waste). This could also consist in creating and disseminating digital-communications tools, educational tools, specific educational programs, or training courses on the topic of waste management.

Set a binding a target of 100% of plastic bottles recycled by 2030

If giving up plastic bottles is too much to ask, then at least they should be recycled. PET plastic bottles are 100% recyclable; therefore, they should be 100% recycled. This requires improving collection and sorting systems, one aspect of which is more efficient waste-treatment centres with proper infrastructures.

A recyclable bottle should not be burned nor used as landfill. As part of the Strategy on Plastics in a Circular Economy, the European Union should raise the recycling targets for plastics, and set a target of 100% of plastic bottles recycled by 2030.

This demand meets a pressing environmental requirement to remove waste thrown directly into the wild, but also the obligation of

<sup>18</sup> Eurostat





White paper for an ocean free from plastic bottles



White paper for an ocean free from plastic bottles

the bottled water industry to increase the recycling of their products.

The optimisation of the collection of plastic bottles for recycling requires that Member States, as part of the implementation of the Circular Economy Package, deploy the necessary resources to:

- provide clear information on the end-of-life management of the product so that the citizen knows exactly what to do with it after use.
- improve labelling and sorting instructions.
- provide citizens with waste-sorting bins and/or deposit-return systems in public places.

### Promote extended producer responsibility (EPR) and extended producer responsibility channels by strengthening the polluter-payer principle

Extended producer responsibility, which derives from the polluter-payer principle, obliges manufacturers, distributors (of their own products) and importers, who place waste-generating products on the market, to handle the resulting waste, including bearing the cost. EPR aims to stimulate recycling and eco-design by including, in the initial selling price, the complete cost of managing the product.

The plastic bottle is no exception to the rule: 80% to 90% of the cost of a bottle of water is suitable to its packaging, a generator of waste move.

In this respect, the Member States must, in implementing the new regime established by the Circular Economy Package, take all the necessary measures to develop efficient channels to recover and reuse and/or recycle plastic packaging, and in particular plastic bottles. These measures must be accompanied by sanctions in order to make them more effective.

This would encourage enterprises to reduce their bottle production, particularly small containers, improve their recycling and eco-design so as to reduce the cost of managing this waste.

## Conclusion

To improve the end-of-life management of plastic bottles is to:

- Inform, reach out and educate to raise the awareness of the general public as to sorting, collecting, deposit-return systems and recycling waste.
- Set a binding target of 100% of plastic bottles recycled by 2030
- Reinforce, at EU level, the extended responsibility of the concerned economic stakeholders (manufacturers, distributors and importers) by promoting a system of Extended Producer Responsibility channels for plastic packaging, including bottles.



Reset  
your habits

Reusable bottles can make the difference