Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (PPWD)

Position Paper

30 July 2021

The European Recycling Industries' Confederation (EuRIC), thanks the European Commission and Eunomia for the informative and often detailed series of workshops to support the measures created within the **Impact Assessment for the revision of the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (PPWD) 94/62/EC.**[1] EuRIC strongly supports the need for ambitious measures in the field of packaging waste, to ensure the much-needed drive towards the circular economy, as promised in the new Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP).[2] The crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic showed that the only manner to de-correlated recycled materials prices from market ones which fail to internalise externalise are binding measures to incentivise circular materials' use[3]. Thus, a continued focus is required on this level of ambition to avoid the watering down of pro-Circular measures.

EuRIC represents the recycling industry at a European level. Gathering the vast majority of national recycling federations from EU/EEA Member States, the Confederation represents about 5.500+ recycling companies – from market leaders to SMEs – generating an aggregated annual turnover of about 95 billion € by treating various waste streams such as household or industrial & commercial waste including ferrous and non-ferrous metals, end-of-life vehicles (ELVs), electronic waste (WEEE), packaging (paper and plastics), end-of-life tyres or textiles.

This paper outlines the key cross-cutting positions of the European Recycling Industry. We look forward to working closely with the European Commission and Eunomia to ensure a progressive push in the revision of the PPWD's essential requirements.

Key messages

Recyclability is one of the key requirements to facilitate the drive towards circularity in the packaging and packaging waste sector. Therefore, EuRIC supports a strong quantitative definition of recyclable packaging to ensure real recyclability is realised in packaging Place on Market (PoM).

Though the working definition, outlined in the Workshop, is a near-ideal definition to facilitate a Circular Economy, some changes are required. This includes precision in defining "at scale" recycling activities, and not providing too much lee-way for "innovative packing" which will never achieve at scale recycling infrastructure. For innovative packaging, proof should be required to ensure recyclability is possible, and that producers can ensure that capacity will be built within a short timeframe (i.e., supported with EPR fee modulation). If this is not achieved then such packaging will merely disrupt contemporary collection, sorting, and recycling processes, majorly hampering the Circular Economy.

The European Commission's goal, outlined in the new CEAP, to ensure that all packaging is reusable or recyclable by 2030 is commendable and supported by EuRIC. Nevertheless, it requires additional ambition to further ensure that all reusable packaging is further recyclable. If not, then poor disposal methods will merely be postponed to a later date, rather than being reduced directly. EuRIC supports addressing the issue at its source by ensuring that most reusable packaging is recyclable, pushing waste up the Waste Hierarchy.

[1] Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste. Link here.
[2] Circular Economy Action Plan: For a cleaner and more competitive Europe. Link here.
[3] EuRIC Press Release - Decisive actions needed to support plastics recycling in Europe, June 2020.

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EuRIC strongly supports mandatory and quantitative Recycled Content targets (and reporting) for packaging production as an essential measure to send the signal that the market needs to invest and scale-up circular value chains able to produce high-quality recycled materials.

Currently, there is a minimal uptake of Raw Materials from Recycling (RMR) in packaging, particularly for plastics (12%, as estimated by Eunomia). However, recycling rates of high-quality recyclates remain much higher. The explanation of this oddity lies in market prices of RMR vs. virgin material prices. The COVID crisis (the collapse of oil prices, and subsequent virgin polymer prices; with the unwavering price of RMR) has proven that without Recycled Content targets linear value changes always have the economic edge. This measure will not only increase the recyclates consumed in Europe, but will also drive-up the demand for our high-quality recyclates (therefore increasing recycling rates).

Beyond plastics, recycled content targets should further be established in other material categories. EuRIC supports recycled content targets for plastics, textile, aluminium, steel, and glass packaging. Though some producers already claim to achieve high recycled content (i.e., for aluminium and glass), a target matching current practices would ensure that laggards are not able avoid their responsibility to ensure circularity.

A strong methodology of any Recycled Content targets or reporting obligations are crucial to avoid possible green-washing opportunities. EuRIC supports real-life criteria which ensure recycled content is measured at a product level. This can stop producers claiming recycled content on packaging, which in reality poses no Recycled Content. Facility and product-level methodologies will ensure that the recycling incentivised by targets is ensured harmoniously across all EU-27 Member States, rather than creating a fractured market.

As stressed at length in EuRIC's position on the Impacts of Biodegradable Plastics on Circularity, **EuRIC further does not see any current justification or added-value in the focus on compostable packaging, in regard to achieving Circular Economy objectives.**

There is very little added-value seen in compostable packaging that currently exists on the market. It is often incorrectly disposed by consumers, leading to issues within mainstream mechanical sorting and recycling processes, as well as consumer littering. In addition, even when properly sent to industrial composting facilities, packaging rarely meets composting standard processes. As a result, most compostable packaging is screened out from the compostable waste stream and incinerated as a residual product.

Any acceptance of compostable packaging must meet real-life industrial conditions and have strict measures to provide consumer awareness, facilitating proper collection. EN standard 13432, must therefore be adapted show an added value of any compostable packaging accepted (either in providing beneficial properties to compost, or not disrupting processes). Any tests, or proof-of-concepts, for compostable plastics must be demonstrated in existing industrial facilities (rather than in a laboratory).

Finally, EuRIC calls the European Commission to consider adopting a definition of "Circular Packaging". This should incorporate both the quantitative definition of recyclable packaging whilst further achieving ambitious recycled content targets (at a product-level).

Recycled Content requirements for this definition could go beyond measures under the already envisaged Recycled Content reporting and target obligations (e.g., 50% for plastics; 70% aluminium, steel, and glass; and 80% paper/cardboard).

Proving such conditions should allow producers to market their front-runner status on their primary and secondary packaging, promoting true sustainability. Furthermore, Circular Packaging could receive derogations

from possible Member State waste prevention targets, having already proved their sustainability. This would reward both Member States and producers that push for ambitiously Circular Packaging.

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