

Environment Committee

'Closing the loop on plastics in a circular economy'

Key takeaways from the panel discussion on microplastics

Panellists:

Dr Nina Maier, German Environment Agency | Heidi Savelli, UN Environment Programme | David Hughes, Johnson & Johnson

1. Definitions are the start to efficient actions

- While the EU has primarily agreed on a shared definition for microplastics (solid, water insoluble particles smaller than 5mm) **there are different methods to determine the quantities, pathways and effects of microplastics.**
- **The definition for microplastics** should go beyond the one-dimensional aspects that it currently recognises and consider the function/physical form of the ingredient. Polyethylene, for example, can be either solid or liquid, but only in its solid form is it treated as a plastic.

2. The need for a comprehensive and holistic approach.

- **All sources of microplastics need to be considered.** Not only the low-hanging fruits, such as intentionally added microbeads, need to be tackled, but also all secondary microplastics.
- **There needs to be a clear and precise regulatory framework** that provides the legal certainty for effective industry change.
- **Greater consideration needs to be given to waste water treatment.** There is currently an overall lack of scientific standards for the removal of microplastics and in some member states the necessary infrastructure for comprehensive waste water treatment is still missing.

3. Combating microplastics at the European and international level

- **International action is being taken by the G7, G20 and the United Nations.** Microplastics were a priority in the 3rd UN Environmental Assembly. EU efforts should reflect these developments.
- **All legislative action should be done at the EU level,** so as to avoid 27 different regulatory systems.
- **Given the cross-border nature of the issue, coordination at international level will be crucial.** All levels of society will have to be involved for there to be a significant impact.

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