

Circular economy – new action plan to increase recycling and reuse of products in the EU

EFBW welcomes the European Commission's new Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP). The European natural mineral and spring water producers market their products in various fully recyclable packaging materials, such as PET, glass or aluminium, which today already achieve a higher than average EU collection and recycling rate.

Our members are committed to further improving the sustainability of their packaging, by making it fully circular. EFBW was the first sector within the food and drink industry to pledge, on 15 May 2018, for 90% collection of PET water bottles and increased uptake of recycled PET in bottles by at least 25% by 2025. EFBW and its members also pledged specific tonnage of additional recycled PET use by 2025, following the EU Plastics Strategy and are signatories to the EU's Circular Plastics Alliance.

In order to make their beverage containers from fully circular resources, producers need a consistent supply of high-quality, food contact, recycled material. To ensure the high standard and quantity of recycled PET is reached, for instance, separate collection is essential. This can either occur via existing well-performing curbside collection, or by the introduction of well-designed Deposit Refund Systems. Once beverage containers are collected, sorted and recycled then a well-functioning internal market for secondary raw materials is needed. This will ensure that supply and demand of recycled materials match, which is crucial for their uptake by the industry. Innovative technologies such as chemical (or enhanced) recycling could help by satisfying the increased demand for recycled plastics.

EFBW was also the first sector to endorse Deposit Refund Systems, in July 2019, as an efficient way to meet the quantitative and qualitative requirements for PET collection and uptake of recycled PET. This is how natural and spring water producers can achieve a strong circular economy and give every bottle a second life.

Natural mineral and spring water producers fully support the European Commission's intention to boost design for recycling. EFBW and its members are involved in pan-industry initiatives on product design. EFBW is a founding member of the European PET Bottle Platform (EPBP), a voluntary industry initiative providing design guidelines for recycling and evaluating new bottle packaging solutions and technologies on the market. Under this initiative, the PET value chain devotes particular attention to both eco-design and light-weighting solutions.

EFBW fully supports the intention of CEAP to empower consumers by providing them with reliable and comparable information on a product's sustainability. The sector participated voluntarily in the Commission's Product Environment Footprint Category Rules (PEFCR) for food and non-food products. Specific category rules for packaged water enable bottled water producers to assess their environmental performance based on a qualitative life cycle assessment.

Our members have already embarked on a transformative journey to become fully circular businesses. They achieve this through separate collection, quality sorting and recycling, which enables them to incorporate a high percentage of recycled materials back into beverage containers. Well performing collection systems and availability of high quality (food grade) recycled materials are key success factors to achieve this transformation.

Natural mineral water and spring waters are food products. Food producers must adhere to strict legal requirements for packaging materials that come into contact with food and beverages. In addition, natural mineral waters must retain their pristine qualities (original purity) from source to final consumer, meaning they must satisfy the most stringent EU hygiene and quality requirements. The swift finalisation of pending authorisation procedures for plastics recycling processes in food contact will pave the way towards an increased uptake of recycled content.

EFBW:

The European Federation of Bottled Waters (EFBW) is the voice of the bottled water industry. We are dedicated to promoting the unique qualities of natural mineral and spring waters as well as sustainable use of water resources and circular economy. EFBW represents almost 550 natural mineral and spring water producers in Europe, most of them small- and medium sized companies located in rural areas.

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