

## **Media briefing**

The European Parliament Environment Committee will vote on the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) on 24.10.23.

# **Will ENVI Committee do bare minimum to protect forests from paper packaging explosion?**

We are deeply concerned that policy makers from the right wing of the European Parliament, will reject key amendments on the PPWR, which have been proposed by **Rapporteur Frédérique Ries as a watered down compromise on the ban of unnecessary single-use packaging.**

The proposals are already too weak, but at least they contain some necessary measures to reduce paper packaging.

It is critical that two articles in particular pass in their current form if the EU is to arrest the huge toll that Member States' spiraling use of paper packaging is extracting on forests and nature:

**Article 22** would phase-out unnecessary single-use packaging.

Lobbying against this article by McDonald's and Italian paper cup manufacturers has been so strong that the debate is no longer science-based. If the ENVI Committee does not pass the original or the compromised versions of Article 22, paper-based packaging will continue its meteoric rise, exacerbating tropical and European forest destruction and degradation.

**Article 26**, which sets clear targets for reuse systems, is also under pressure. Reuse systems effectively reduce pressure on forests and other natural environments. They not only reduce destruction but also the litter that plagues our streets. Unfortunately they have been under relentless attacks by the single-use packaging industry who profit every time a new cup is bought, used and chucked away.

If these articles do not survive, the Packaging Regulation will do nothing to support the circular economy.

## **Weakened ambition**

The Parliament's text is likely to be a lot less ambitious than the Commission's original proposal, but the proposed compromise amendments at least maintain the ban on all single-use packaging for eating in restaurants. This would be a significant step forward in preventing a shift from throwaway plastic to throwaway paper, effectively protecting human and forest health.

On the down side, the compromise amendments introduce multiple derogations which sap the law's potential. Amongst these, is the possibility for Commission to “adopt delegated acts to depart from the waste hierarchy for specific waste streams if justified by an independent and peer reviewed Life Cycle Assessment” in Articles 22 and 26.

Such Assessments are complex and contextual and could easily be abused to unjustly undermine the waste hierarchy.

### **Profiting at forests' expense**

Lobbyists for the single-use packaging industry have already watered down the Parliament's version of the Regulation. They see a significant business opportunity if they are allowed to continue to shift from plastic to paper. Companies like Seda (paper cups) and Huhtamaki (paper-based food applications) are at the forefront of this lobby effort. These companies have been increasing their profits at the expense of overlogged forests in Finland and Sweden; overexpansion of eucalyptus plantations in Portugal; and even paper imports from South America and South-East Asia, where tropical deforestation is a serious issue.

The corrugated cardboard industry, which has grown exponentially thanks to e-commerce and increased demand for throwaway cardboard crates, has managed to get cardboard excluded from waste reduction targets. In November 2022 they lobbied for a shift from plastic to paper for transport packaging - meaning that cardboard is no longer included in reuse targets. This is despite the fact that reusable boxes are already widely and successfully used.

### **Misleading sustainability claims**

Paper packaging industries have attempted to portray paper as a “green” or “renewable” alternative to plastic - this is misleading.

In the food packaging industry, 90% of paper pulp is made from virgin fiber, thereby intensifying European pulp production and increasing pulp imports from tropical forests. We cannot afford to pulp forests for paper packaging. These forests are homes for local and Indigenous communities. They house nature and cool the planet. And they are the lifeblood of industries producing high added value wood products, such as wood for construction.

If lobbying efforts succeed in sowing doubt on the need to reduce paper-based packaging it would undermine the Regulation's potential and our streets would be filled with throwaway paper instead of throwaway plastic.

This would be catastrophic in so many ways.



We believe that keeping an ambitious timeline is both possible and necessary. Curbing the explosion of packaging is urgently needed to protect forests from overharvesting and to end the Waste Economy.

**Sergio Baffoni, Senior Campaign Coordinator, Environmental Paper Network (EPN), said :**

“If we want to reduce garbage and protect European and tropical forests, we must urgently curb increasing reliance on single-use paper-based packaging. Banning useless throwaway plates and cups in restaurants - be they plastic or paper - is the bare minimum. It is deeply disturbing that McDonald’s’ lobbyists might actually succeed in gutting the PPWR. The ban on unnecessary single-use packaging must pass Tuesday’s vote. Otherwise the immense human and environmental suffering wrought by the pulp and paper industry will continue unabated.”