

EU demands 80% reduction in use of plastic bags by 2019: New targets mean all countries will be forced to bring in charges or bans

- Euro MPs vote in favour of strict new targets to reduce plastic bag use
- Move is huge boost for conservationists, fighting to reduce plastic litter
- Campaigners, backed by the Daily Mail, have successfully fought for a supermarket plastic bag charge in Britain, which will be introduced in 2015

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Every nation in Europe will have to bring in tough new measures to slash the use of plastic bags, after a key EU vote yesterday.

Euro MPs voted in favour of strict new targets forcing each country to reduce plastic bag use by 80 per cent before 2019.

The decision is a huge boost for conservationists, who have been fighting for years to reduce the huge volumes of devastating plastic

litter harming the environment.



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Euro MPs have voted in favour of strict new targets forcing each country to reduce plastic bag use by 80 per cent before 2019 (file picture)

Backed by the Daily Mail, campaigners have successfully fought for a supermarket plastic bag charge in Britain, which will be introduced

in 2015.

Every other EU nation will now have to bring in similar measures if they are to meet the strict target - or leave themselves open to large fines.

MEPs suggest they will either have to introduce a charge for bags or tax shops which give them out for free.

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The EU directive, which will pass into law in the coming weeks, also removes blocks to outright bans on plastic bags for the first time.

Sue Kinsey of the Marine Conservation Society said: 'This is a fantastic result and will lead to the drastic reduction of single use carrier bags given out throughout Europe.' An estimated 100 billion carrier bags are used every year in Europe - with 8 billion ending up as litter.

Many of those end up in seas and rivers, killing millions of marine animals.



The decision is a huge boost for conservationists, who have been fighting for years to reduce the huge volumes of devastating plastic litter harming the environment

A 2004 study of wildlife in the North Sea found 96 per cent of dead sea birds had fragments of plastic in their stomachs.

Nick Clegg announced last year that supermarkets and other large stores in England will have to charge 5p for plastic bags from 2015.

Ireland and Wales have already introduced charges for bags and have seen the volume of plastic bag litter plummet as a result.

Italy is currently facing legal action from the European Commission, after launching Europe's first plastic bag ban in 2011.

That case will now be dropped, paving the way for other nations to follow suit with an outright ban on lightweight bags.



Backed by the Daily Mail, campaigners have successfully fought for a supermarket plastic bag charge in Britain, which will be introduced in 2015

Chris Davies MEP, environment spokesman for the Liberal Democrats in Europe said: 'Discarded plastic bags are killing millions of marine animals each year. It's become a massive problem across Europe and one we must deal with together.

'Every country has the right to decide what action to take, but the need to reduce the huge volumes of plastic waste we create should not be in dispute.' But Tory MEPs say the rules will place an 'unreasonable burden' on businesses.

A Conservative spokesman in Strasbourg said: 'Conservatives agree that action needs to be taken to reduce the distribution of these bags.

'Discarded plastic bags are an iconic symbol of waste and a visible form of littering, and the environmental impact extends beyond littering to their production and disposal in landfill.

'Discarded plastic bags are killing millions of marine animals each year. It's become a massive problem across Europe and one we must deal with together'

- Chris Davies MEP

'However, the current proposals are muddled over just how plastic-bag consumption should be measured and recorded.

'Existing and planned domestic legislation in the UK requires reporting on consumption of lightweight plastic bags by large retailers.

'So extending the legislation to include ultra-light plastic bags, and bringing small businesses into the scope, brings an unreasonable burden.'

Joan Walley MP, chair of the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee said: 'The vote by European Parliamentarians is another reminder of the importance of reducing the litter and environmental damage that unnecessary use of plastic bags can cause.

'A simple and consistent 5p charge for all single-use carrier bags in all stores is the best way to have the biggest impact and to achieve reductions in use of 80 per cent or more.'