

THE OCEAN



Policy in practice

TAXES ON SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

Region: [Europe](#)

Countries: [United Kingdom](#) | [Ireland](#)

Tags: [Plastic](#) | [Single-use plastics](#) | [Tax](#)

Themes: [Finance](#) | [Pollution](#)



Responsible consumption and production



Life below water

Policy in practice

In recent years, increasing public awareness of the issue of plastics pollution has led to the implementation of numerous waste prevention policies across the world. The complexity of the plastics value chain calls for the application of multiple policy instruments to address all the environmental externalities emerging across the life-cycle, including market-based instruments such as taxes.

Taxes on plastic material, certain types of plastics polymer or certain uses of plastics (e.g. single-use packaging) can help reduce unsustainable consumption of plastic materials. The application of taxes to single-use plastic items can help to increase the price of such items, and therefore drive demand away from such items and result in substitution. Well-designed taxes should lead to the use of more durable and/or more sustainable alternatives. Such alternatives could include redesigned plastic options (e.g. more readily recyclable, compostable or conversely more durable plastic) or non-plastic alternatives (e.g. manufactured from wood, metal or glass).

Some examples of taxes on single-use plastics include:

- In October 2011, Wales was the first country in the United Kingdom to introduce a mandatory charge on all carrier bags, regardless of their material, in order to curb their consumption beyond what had been achieved through a voluntary agreement with supermarkets. The charge applies to single-use bags made fully or mainly from plastic, paper and plant-based starch which are not intended for multiple reuse. The charge has successfully contributed to curb carrier bag consumption, which has been estimated to drop by 71% between 2011 and 2014.
- In 2014, a mandatory charge on carrier bags was introduced in Scotland, thus setting a minimum price of GBP 0.05 for new single-use bags supplied at point of sale and made of plastics, paper and certain plant-based materials. Zero Waste Scotland estimated that the charge contributed to reducing carrier bag use by about 80% across the 7 main retail chains in its first year of application, amounting to at least 650 million fewer bags.
- Ireland introduced a EUR 0.15 plastic bag levy in 2002. The tax, levied on consumers, applies to bags made wholly or partly of plastic, sold at any sales outlet. The government set the tax at this level following a survey indicating that average consumer willingness to pay for plastic bags hovered around EUR 0.024. The price signal was thus set at EUR 0.15, more than 6 times higher than the average

maximum willingness to pay. This led to an immediate 90% reduction in the use of plastic bags. As consumption of single-use plastic carrier bags started increasing again in 2006, the tax was increased from EUR 0.15 to EUR 0.22 per bag. The Irish tax on single-use plastic carrier bags has been particularly successful at reducing bag consumption partly thanks to the important accompanying information campaign which, explaining policy objectives and tax revenue destinations, paved the way for widespread awareness and buy-in.

Key policy message

Market-based instruments, such as taxes, aimed at preventing single-use plastics can reduce the generation of plastic waste and its leakage into the environment.

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