

ENVIRONMENT

'Not enough action from EU on plastic'

On the heels of the EU plastics strategy, which includes making plastic packaging recyclable by 2030, DW spoke with the environment minister of Sweden, who has pushed for stronger measures to manage plastic waste.

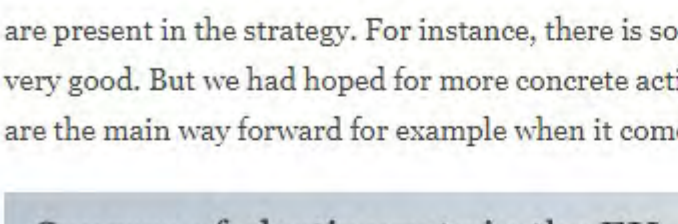


Plastic pollution is a great threat for marine wildlife and ocean ecosystems

The first-ever Europe-wide [strategy on plastics](#) was adopted Tuesday as part of the European Union transition toward a circular economy. Among its main thrusts are that all plastic packaging on the EU market should be recyclable by 2030; that the consumption of single-use plastics shall be reduced; and that the intentional use of microplastics will be restricted.

DW discussed the newly adopted strategy with her, along with the next steps in fighting [plastic pollution](#).

DW: You sent a joint letter asking for ambitious action ahead of the EU plastics strategy decision. What were your main points?



Skog had hoped for more concrete measures from the EU plastics strategy

Karolina Skog: We mainly asked for concrete measures on plastics. We asked for actions against microplastics, for stronger responsibility on the ways plastic is exported out of the EU, and for strong measures to get packaging reduced and easily recyclable.

Have you seen your requests fulfilled with this new strategy?

All the issues that we have raised from Sweden within this letter, and in other circumstances, are present in the strategy. For instance, there is some action planned against [microplastics](#), which is very good. But we had hoped for more concrete action and more concrete legislative measures, which are the main way forward for example when it comes to single-use plastic.

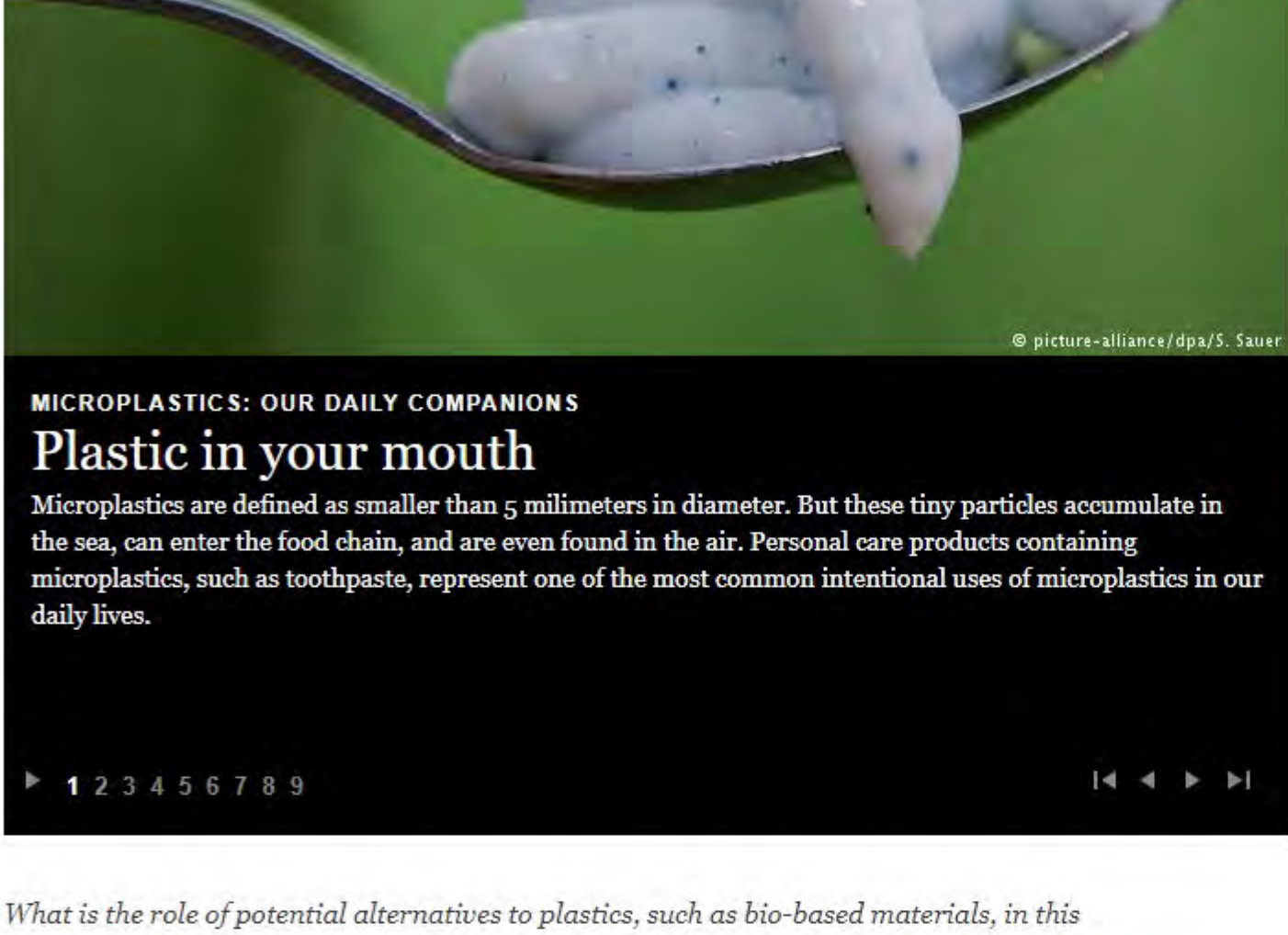


The European Commission has started discussing stronger restrictions for microplastics. However, this is only a first step. What do you think would be the appropriate measures for tackling this problem?

From Sweden, we want a complete ban on intentionally used microplastics in the EU. We are preparing a national ban, but we do think that the right measure should be a European ban on all added microplastics.

The European Commission has also started discussing the viability of imposing a tax on plastic products. What's your view on this?

Generally, in Sweden we do see taxes as a national competency, and that makes us reluctant to use it at the EU level. In terms of action against plastics, we do focus on legislative measures more than tax measures.



MICROPLASTICS: OUR DAILY COMPANIONS

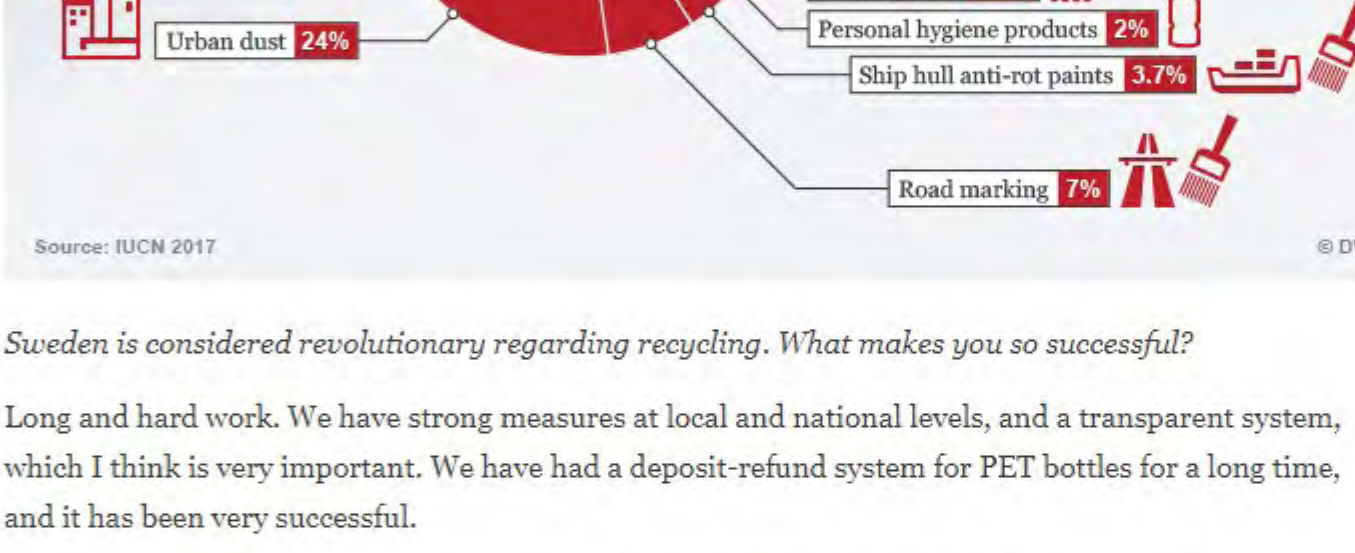
Plastic in your mouth

Microplastics are defined as smaller than 5 millimeters in diameter. But these tiny particles accumulate in the sea, can enter the food chain, and are even found in the air. Personal care products containing microplastics, such as toothpaste, represent one of the most common intentional uses of microplastics in our daily lives.

▶ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

What is the role of potential alternatives to plastics, such as bio-based materials, in this transformation?

I see a need to have further research and go deeper into the question of [biodegradable materials](#). Biodegradable plastics might play a role for some specific uses, but we must be very careful and make sure that anything that is marketed as biodegradable in the European market, is really biodegradable in natural circumstances. For example, oxoplastics are not biodegradable, but only break down into smaller pieces — it is even worse than normal plastic. We must be very strict on what can be called biodegradable and how to inform the consumer about it.



Sweden is considered revolutionary regarding recycling. What makes you so successful?

Long and hard work. We have strong measures at local and national levels, and a transparent system, which I think is very important. We have had a deposit-refund system for PET bottles for a long time, and it has been very successful.

Yet we're working on measures to raise the level of recycling even more — particularly on plastics. We're working, for instance, on introducing more packaging and material into the deposit-refund system.

I'm also not content that most of the plastics that are sorted out in the EU are exported to third countries, because we know way too little of what's happening when it reaches Asia or Africa. We need more recycling facilities in Europe, and I am working on how to figure out which policy could make investment in recycling treatment in Europe viable.



A large proportion of our waste ends up in developing countries

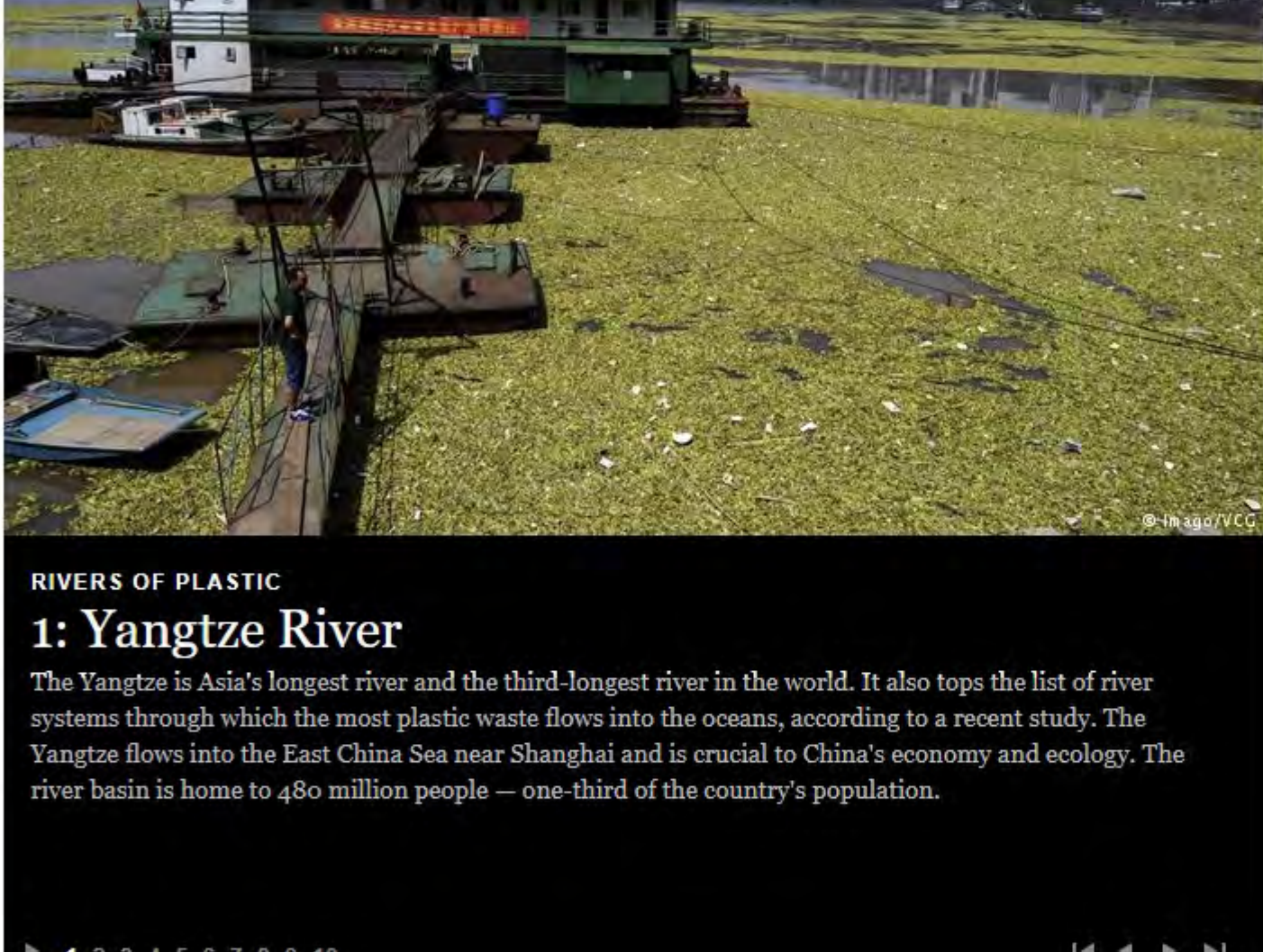
Sweden has also been importing waste from other countries and using it for heat and energy through incineration. Yet, incineration is not as beneficial as recycling, from an environmental point of view. What's the future of waste incineration?

We think incineration is a sustainable method, but it must not be overused. Quite a lot of material that can be recycled is being incinerated, and we're not content with that. Therefore, we are looking at measures to make the incineration less economically viable and instead make recycling easier — easier for the consumer, but also more economically viable.

What are the remaining challenges regarding plastics for the EU to reach a sustainable model?

Stopping the export of sorted out plastics outside the EU and making sure that we get investment in recycling facilities in Europe. We need a transparent, coherent and economically viable recycling system.

Karolina Skog is the Swedish environment minister. She is a member of the Green Party, and served as a city commissioner in Malmö before the cabinet appointment.



RIVERS OF PLASTIC

1: Yangtze River

The Yangtze is Asia's longest river and the third-longest river in the world. It also tops the list of river systems through which the most plastic waste flows into the oceans, according to a recent study. The Yangtze flows into the East China Sea near Shanghai and is crucial to China's economy and ecology. The river basin is home to 480 million people — one-third of the country's population.

▶ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

DW RECOMMENDS

- » EU unveils plan to make all plastic packaging recyclable by 2030
The EU wants to make all plastic packaging recyclable, reduce single-use plastic and restrict microplastics. The plan would "lay the foundations for a new plastic economy." (16.01.2018)
- » Teenage 'plastic pirates': Citizen scientists research waste in German rivers
More than 5,500 teenagers collected trash from German rivers, took water samples, documented their findings — and analyzed the data with scientists. The results are alarming, says teacher and scientist Katrin Kruse. (03.01.2018)
- » UN resolves to end ocean plastic waste
At the United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi, more than 200 nations passed a resolution to eliminate plastic pollution in our seas. Although it's not a legally binding treaty, it could pave the way to one. (07.12.2017)
- » Doing Your Bit: A French engineer has created a biodegradable plastic
Plastic pollution has become a major problem for the planet. One French entrepreneur is trying to fight the scourge with a 100 percent biodegradable water bottle. (06.12.2017)
- » Plastic is junk food for coral
Coral behaves unexpectedly when it comes to consuming plastic. Although it's well known that they do swallow microplastic particles, what is really strange is that they seem to actually like it. (26.10.2017)
- » Big businesses vow to tackle plastics problem
At the World Economic Forum in Davos, major corporations have signed on to an initiative to better reuse and recycle plastic packaging - to reap economic benefits, and in hopes of stemming an environmental crisis. (17.01.2017)
- » Microplastics: Our daily companions
Tiny pieces of plastic, or microplastics, are everywhere — despite potentially harmful effects on the environment and human health. Here are just a few of the products in our day-to-day life that contain microplastics. (17.01.2018)
- » Rivers of plastic
Most of the plastic that ends up in our oceans is carried by eight rivers in Asia and two in Africa. They face many other environmental problems too. (30.11.2017)

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Related Subjects [Europe](#), [Environment](#), [Waste](#), [Oceans](#), [Recycling](#), [Pollution](#)

Keywords [environment](#), [Europe](#), [plastic](#), [pollution](#), [plastic pollution](#), [microplastics](#), [recycling](#), [circular economy](#), [waste](#), [oceans](#)

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#Interview: "From Sweden, we want a complete ban on intentionally used microplastics in the EU. We are preparing a national ban, but we do think that the right measure should be a European ban on all

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A small video thumbnail showing a person standing in a field, possibly a farmer or a conservationist.

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AUDIO

The logo for the Living Planet podcast, featuring the text "living planet" in a stylized font.

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MORE ENVIRONMENT

World's largest underwater cave discovered in Mexico

Divers have proven two underwater caverns in Mexico are connected. The discovery makes it the largest flooded cave on the planet. The exploratory mission has also provided insight into the Mayan civilization.

Welcome to this week's [eco@africa](#)

Nature's winged arsonists

New York City sues oil companies for climate change damages

GLOBAL IDEAS

A photograph of a rocket launch, showing a bright trail of fire and smoke as the rocket ascends into the sky.

To fly or not to fly?
As air travel becomes ever more popular, the environment stands to suffer. What's the solution?

ECO@AFRICA

A photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a red shirt, standing outdoors in front of some trees.

Welcome to eco@africa
This week on eco@africa: farming fish in Nigeria, erosion in Mauritania and nano grids in Kenya.

German patient is immune to highly poisonous ricin

BUSINESS

Tax code sees Apple boost investments in US

Berliners campaign to limit billboard ads

British govt. scrutinizes second outsourcing firm after Carillion collapse

Bitcoin drops below \$10,000 threshold