

Collection and Recycling of Farm Plastics

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Wednesday, 15th May 2024 at 5.30 p.m

Opening Statement of Mr Ossian Smyth, T.D., Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications with responsibility for Communications and Circular Economy

One of my Department's functions in relation to waste management is to set the policy and legislative framework for the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) model in Ireland, across the various waste streams. Ireland uses the EPR model for dealing with a number of waste streams, including farm plastics, packaging, end of life vehicles, electrical equipment, tyres and batteries. These schemes have been developed based on the 'producer pays' principle. To date, these schemes have operated very successfully and have enabled Ireland to reach our domestic and EU recycling targets. My Department is not

responsible for and has no role in the operational and day to day matters of any of the schemes.

Ireland is one of the few countries in Europe to have introduced legislation specifically designed to promote farm plastics recycling. This legislation is critical as it places a legal responsibility on producers of farm film products to specifically support recycling. The options open to producers placing farm film products on the Irish market are to either become directly involved in the recycling of farm plastics waste with their customers by operating a deposit and return scheme, or to participate in the Government approved farm plastics recycling scheme.

The primary role of the Department in relation to farm plastics matters is to provide the legislative framework. Under the legislation, the Irish Farm Film Producers Group Ltd. (IFFPG) operates further to an approval granted by the Department as the national farm plastics recycling scheme and has been doing

so 1998. The company is a not for profit body, which is owned by its members and the Irish Farmers' Association.

Under the approved scheme producers pay an environmental protection levy to IFFPG based on the quantity of product they place on the market. The environmental levy applies to all product based on the Irish market. The levy, along with a collection fee set by IFFPG, is used to fund and provide for the collection, transportation and treatment of farm film plastics.

The Department is not responsible for and has no role in the operational and day to day matters of IFFPG which include details regarding the levy and collection scheme.

The role of the Department is in oversight of discharge by IFFPG of the terms of its Approval. IFFPG has performed very well in relation to its record of collection and recycling of farm plastic, at around 90%. Its target under the Approval is 70%. However there are challenges facing the sector. The costs for recycling are currently high due to the closure of the Chinese market to

plastics, the war in Ukraine, which drove an increase in costs by 18%, and by lower than expected sales compared with collections arising from weather and cost issues being faced by the agricultural sector. The Department is supportive of the IFFPG goal of ensuring a full service to farmers this year and is supportive of the Scheme's contribution to environmental management of farm plastics.