



From fibre to future: the business case for a circular bioeconomy

On 23 September, Fibre Packaging Europe (FPE) organised a high-level policy dialogue in Brussels to explore the role of fibre-based packaging in advancing the EU's circular economy and competitiveness. Hosted by MEP Stefan Köhler (EPP), the event brought together policymakers, industry leaders and experts to discuss how fibre-based packaging can deliver both environmental and economic benefits.

The event opened with a clear message: **Europe's transition to a circular bioeconomy requires strong collaboration between policymakers, industry and civil society.**



Fibre at work

As a coalition of seven trade associations, FPE represents Europe's forestry, pulp, paper, packaging, board and carton production and recycling industries. The event underlined that this industry is not only essential for packaging innovation but also for Europe's competitiveness and economic resilience. The fibre-based packaging value chain spans over 1,500 companies, supports more than 365,000 jobs and generates €120 billion in turnover. To maintain momentum, the sector is calling for harmonised and simplified rules that offer the regulatory stability needed to invest and grow.

Fibre Packaging Europe

European coalition for renewable, circular and sustainable paper and board packaging.



1500 companies



2200 manufacturing plants



365.000 people across Europe



EUR 120 billion annual turnover

During the event, participants explored an immersive “*From fibre to future*” exhibition featuring products provided by members of FPE. The showcase demonstrated the role of fibre-based packaging in everyday life, from agro-paper made from agricultural waste to food-trays and Bag-in-Box innovations. This highlighted the different uses of fibre packaging that combine food safety, recyclability, and renewability, underlining the industry’s readiness to provide scalable, sustainable packaging solutions. QR codes provided in-depth [product information](#), highlighting that sustainable solutions are already available and scaling up.



Incentivising circularity

A central highlight of the evening was the panel discussion “*Incentivising the circular business case for fibre packaging – priorities for the circular economy act and the environment omnibus*”, moderated by Mike Turner, FPE member and Managing Director of ECMA. Speakers included MEPs Stefan Köhler, Jeannette Baljeu (Renew), and Sakis Arnaoutoglou (S&D), alongside Jouni Nissinen from the Finnish Representation to the EU and Marco Eikelenboom, Chair of the FPE Presidents Group, Chairman of Cepi and CEO of Sappi Europe.

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Mr Eikelenboom set the tone by highlighting that fibre-based packaging is already Europe's most recycled packaging material with an 86,6% recycling rate (Eurostat, 2023). Yet, he stressed that regulation must recognise the recyclability and renewability of fibre, cautioning against rigid classifications that risk penalising innovative products that are fibre-based but contain minor coatings. His intervention paved the way for a discussion centred on balancing ambition with practicality.

He declared: *"I want to share the impressive recycling rates of fibre-based packaging, 86.6%, positioning it as the most recycled packaging material in Europe. What the industry needs now are clearer definitions around bio-based and composite materials, predictability of the legal framework and no penalisation of innovative solutions that are fibre-based but still classified as plastic due to minor coatings."*

Building on this theme, MEP Baljeu pointed to the urgent need for harmonised recycling systems across Europe, noting consumer confusion caused by inconsistent bin colours and collection methods in different countries. For her, harmonisation is essential, and regulation should empower industry-led, market-driven solutions rather than impose top-down mandates.

She added: *"Harmonising recycling systems across Europe and preventing the confusion caused by differing bin colours and collection methods is key for a true circular economy."*

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Practical, market-driven solutions and better cooperation with producers are crucial to ensure feasible and effective regulations. All of this is a prerequisite for a strong European industry.”



MEP Arnaoutoglou extended the conversation to the human and technological dimensions of circularity. He emphasised the importance of education, science and innovation to keep Europe competitive. Clear, realistic and well-communicated rules, he argued, ensure that citizens understand and support the circular transition, transforming policy into everyday practice.

He explained: *“Public awareness and clear communication are key. As a former weather forecaster, I’ve seen how citizens often misunderstand terms like ‘fibres,’ confusing them with plastic. We need better education and investment in science and innovation to keep Europe competitive.”*

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Mr Nissinen brought a national perspective, showcasing Finland's success in recycling and reuse. He attributed this to clear targets, economic incentives and strong public awareness, elements he believes must underpin EU-wide policy if high-quality recycling is to be achieved across all Member States. His remarks echoed earlier calls for predictability and alignment but added an emphasis on the role of civic engagement in making circular systems work in practice.

He stated: *"We need to get a better education, clearer targets, and economic incentives to drive behavioural change.*

We also need future-proof legislation that can adapt to evolving technologies and market realities."



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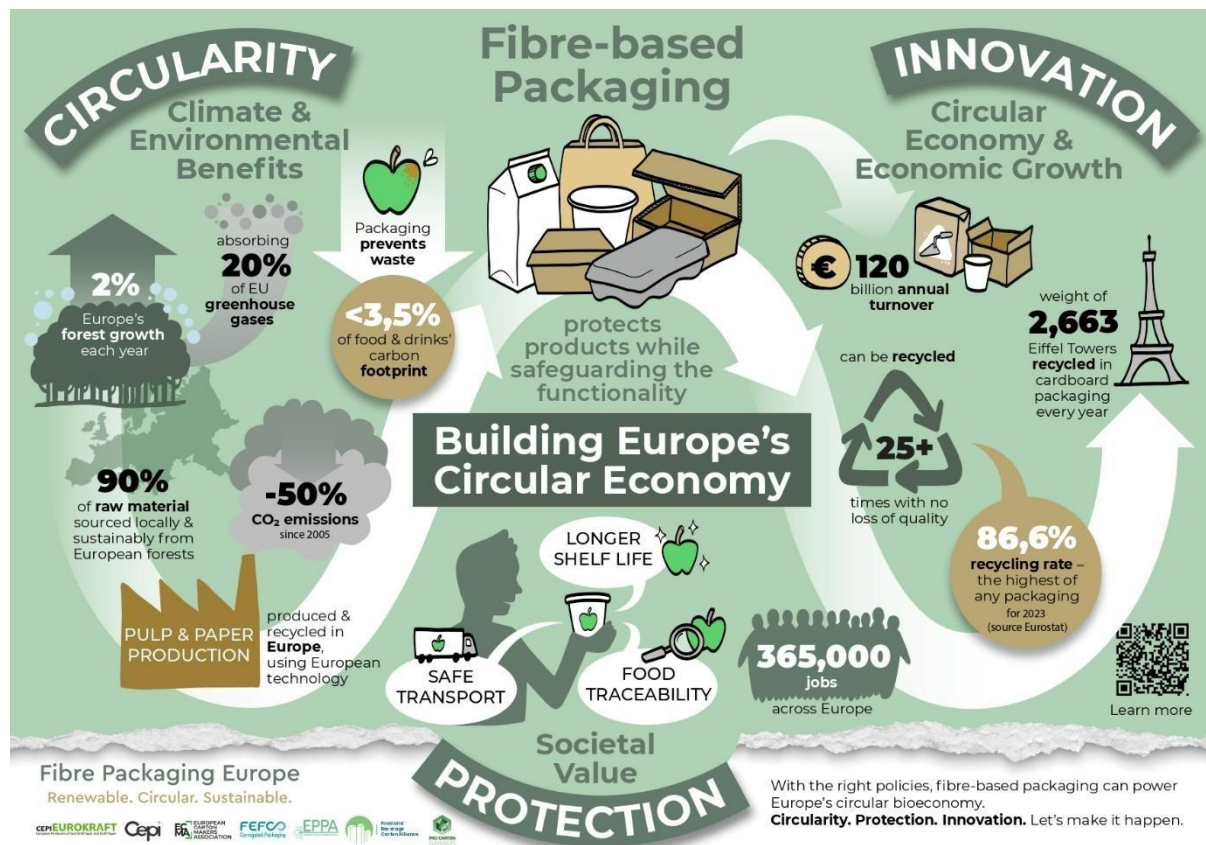
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As the discussion progressed, the panel touched on one of the industry's most persistent obstacles: regulatory complexity. Speakers voiced concern about the EU's growing reliance on delegated and implementing acts, which often delay technical specifications until 2030 or later. This uncertainty makes long-term investment decisions difficult. Mr Eikelenboom illustrated the consequences with a concrete example where his company had made significant investments to meet the 31 December 2025 target under the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), only to see the deadline postponed. These shifting timelines create uncertainty that undermines both investment and trust. MEPs acknowledged these concerns, agreeing that the European Parliament must play a stronger role and that industry should provide unified, data-driven input to influence outcomes.

Despite differing emphases, the debate highlighted a common understanding: **Europe needs predictable, harmonised and future-proof regulation that fosters circularity, not complexity.** These priorities align closely with [FPE's position](#), which urges policymakers not to reopen the PPWR to ensure regulatory stability and investment certainty for the industry.



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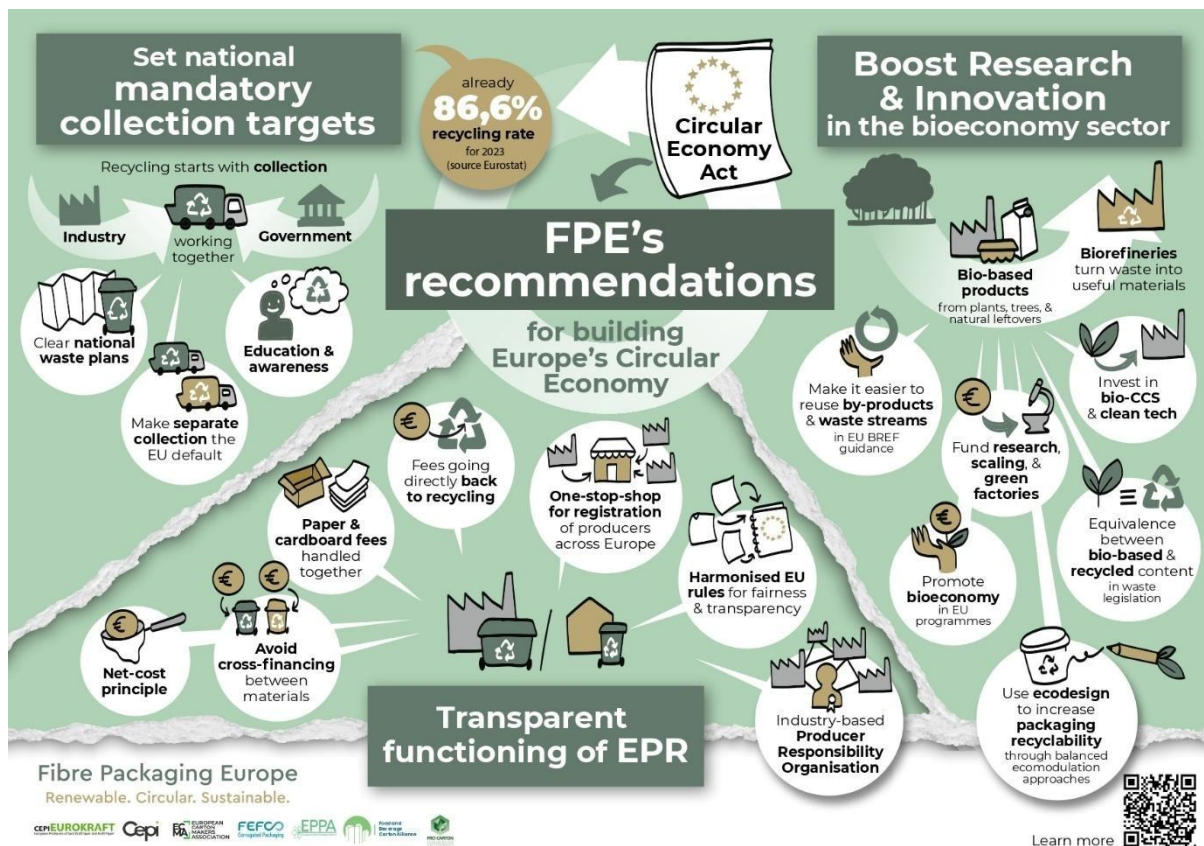
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Celebrating fibre innovation

The evening concluded with a networking reception featuring the themed drink “the *Fibre Fever*”, whose earthy undertones symbolised the circular journey of fibre through packaging and recycling. Guests also enjoyed a walk-through of the exhibition, celebrating the creativity and commitment of Europe’s fibre-based packaging sector. The event delivered a clear message: Europe’s fibre-based packaging industry is ready to lead the circular transition, provided regulation empowers rather than obstructs the process.



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About Fibre Packaging Europe

Fibre Packaging Europe is an informal packaging coalition of seven trade associations representing industries involved in forestry, pulp, paper, board and carton production and recycling from across Europe. Our joint mission is to provide renewable, circular and sustainable fibre-based packaging solutions to European citizens to achieve the European Green Deal objectives. For more information, please contact info.fpe@logos-pa.com



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