

# **Single-Use Plastic**

### Why in News

Recently, a report was published which gave details of who makes <u>single-use plastic</u>, **130 million tons** a year at last count, and who makes money from it.

• The report was published by **Minderoo**, a nonprofit organization based in Australia along with academics at the University of Oxford and the Stockholm Environment Institute.

# **Key Points**

- Major Producers:
  - Half of the world's single-use plastic is made by 20 big companies.
    - Two US companies followed by a Chinese-owned petrochemicals giant, and another one based in Bangkok.
- Major Investors:
  - Production is financed by financial services companies including banks.
  - Governments are also big stakeholders in this industry. About 40% of the largest single-use plastic makers are partly owned by governments, including China and Saudi Arabia.
- Growth:
  - Single-use plastic has been a very good business, and that's projected to continue. In the next five years alone, production capacity is forecast to grow by 30%.
- Usage:
  - There's a huge disparity between richer and poorer nations:
    - An average American uses and throws away 50 kilograms of single-use plastic every year whereas an average Indian uses less than one-twelfth of an American.
- Concerns:
  - Less Recycling:
    - Only about 8% of plastic gets recycled in the US. It is far cheaper to make things out of newly produced plastic than from recycled plastic.
  - Limited Efforts:
    - State and municipal governments have had success in banning certain items like plastic grocery bags, foam cups and drinking straws. But the **efforts focused on curtailing the production of single-use plastic have been limited so far.**
    - Advocacy efforts to persuade consumers to use less plastic have failed to gain traction.

#### Global Initiatives:

<u>European Union</u> issued a directive calling for consumer brands to use at least 30% recycled content in plastic bottles by 2025.

#### Indian Initiatives:

- In 2019, the Union government in a bid to free India of single-use plastics by 2022, had <u>laid out a multi-ministerial plan</u> to discourage the use of single-use plastics across the country.
- Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 which extended the responsibility to collect waste generated from the products to their producers and brand owners.

### Single-Use Plastics

#### About:

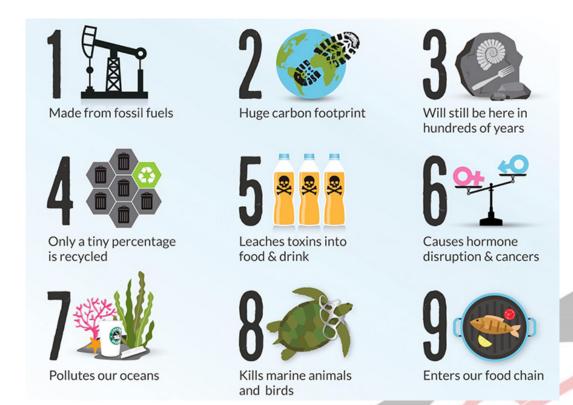
- Single-use plastics, or disposable plastics, are used only once before they are thrown away or recycled.
  - These items are things like plastic bags, straws, coffee stirrers, soda and water bottles and most food packaging.
- Plastic is so cheap and convenient that it has replaced all other materials from the packaging industry but it takes hundreds of years to disintegrate.
  - It is a huge problem. If we look at the data, out of 9.46 million tonnes of plastic waste generated every year in our country, 43% is single use plastic.

#### Uses:

- The single-use plastic products also prevent the spread of infection.
  - Instruments such as syringes, applicators, drug tests, bandages and wraps are often made to be disposable.
- Also, single-use plastic products have been enlisted in the fight against food waste, keeping food and water fresher for longer and reducing the potential for contamination.

#### Problems:

- **Petroleum-based plastic is not biodegradable** and usually goes into a landfill where it is buried or it gets into the water and finds its way into the ocean.
- In the process of breaking down, it releases toxic chemicals (additives that were used to shape and harden the plastic) which make their way into our food and water supply.



# **Way Forward**

- Economically **affordable and ecologically viable alternatives** which will not burden the resources are needed and their prices will also come down with time and increase in demand.
  - Need to **promote alternatives** like cotton, khadi bags and biodegradable plastics.
  - More R&D (Research & Development) and finances for it, are needed to look for sustainably viable options.
- Citizens have to bring **behavioural change** and contribute by not littering and helping in waste segregation and waste management.

### Source: IE

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