

OceanCare poll on plastics

Three quarters of the Swiss are convinced: Switzerland has a plastic problem, and the majority want binding laws now

OceanCare press release Plastic-Poll
Wädenswil/Berne, October 31st, 2022

Switzerland has a plastics problem. That is the opinion of almost three quarters of the population. 25% even see it as a massive problem. OceanCare's decades of educational work and awareness raising efforts are having an effect: people are very concerned about plastics in the oceans - and this worries them even more than plastics in their drinking water. But above all: the desire for immediate legally binding measures is significant

These are the core statements of the representative poll conducted by the research institute gfs.bern, which was commissioned by OceanCare, a Swiss-based marine conservation organisation. The aim of the survey was to gain insight in the plastic problem and its awareness among the Swiss population as well as to find possible solutions. The results hold some surprises.

- **Swiss are more concerned about plastics in the oceans and on beaches than about plastics in Swiss nature or drinking water**
- **Packaging waste is a widespread problem**
- **The older generation is more aware of the problem than younger respondents**
- **Despite a high level of awareness of the problem and the view that a lot of plastic waste could be avoided, many respondents believe that they are doing enough themselves**
- **The majority of Swiss finally want clear binding laws against the flood of plastic waste**

Plastic Gyre in the North Pacific almost 40 times the size of Switzerland

Every year, around 9 million tonnes of plastic end up in the world's oceans. By now, all oceans are affected by plastic waste, including remote beaches and the seabed of Antarctica. Around 17,600 tonnes of plastic end up every year in the Mediterranean Sea alone. Particularly visible are the millions of tonnes of plastic waste in five huge garbage patches; one of them, the Pacific Gyre, is almost forty times bigger than the size of Switzerland. OceanCare is campaigning intensively internationally for a global plastics treaty to end plastic pollution - which covers the full plastics- life-cycle: from extraction of fossil fuels as feed stock, production, and use, to disposal and reuse of plastic. Rivers are the roots of the oceans: the sea begins in Switzerland. That is why OceanCare is also committed nationally to combating the flood of plastic which is already directly affecting Switzerland.

THE POLL IN DETAIL

Plastic: Packaging waste - older generation particularly worried

The Swiss consider plastic packaging to be the biggest problem. Especially double packaging is seen as unnecessary (34%), and that, in general, there is "too much packaging" (30%). In second and third place in terms of criticism are plastic waste and recycling. Interestingly, it was found that the older generation is especially worried about the plastic problem - unlike most public climate debates, which are strongly driven by younger people.

"Plastic pollution is increasingly affecting life in Switzerland. Microplastics are already found in large quantities in the snow in the Alps, in our soils and waters. "We wanted to do a reality check on the plastic problem to see how

aware people were in Switzerland," says Fabienne McLellan, Managing Director and Lead of the Plastics Programme at OceanCare. "To be able to pull the levers where they are the most impactful, we need accurate information. The representative survey results thus give us important information about where action and persuasion are needed," says McLellan.

Three out of four Swiss are particularly concerned about plastic waste in the oceans and on beaches

The next surprise: normally, in surveys, "the closer the problem, the greater the concern". Surprisingly, however, the opposite is true when it comes to the plastic issue: 73% of the Swiss perceive plastic in the sea and on beaches as more problematic than plastic in Swiss nature. This awareness of the problem cuts across all political camps from left to right and cannot be dismissed as a classic 'eco-issue'. Also, half of the SVP party voters responded that they are concerned about plastic pollution in the oceans. Plastic pollution of Swiss nature worries only half of those surveyed (54%), and plastic in local drinking water even fewer people (43%). Interestingly, people living in the countryside, who are in more direct contact with nature, rate these issues very similarly to urban residents.

Personal responsibility - majority of Swiss underestimate their own plastic consumption

Most respondents underestimate how much plastic they use each year - it is actually 125 kilos instead of the estimated 100 kilos. And, although the Swiss are clearly aware of the plastic problem, with 93 %, waste separation is so far the only environmental protection measure that is sustainably anchored in most of the population. Only just over half of the population avoids waste when shopping (59%), already buys less (56%) and refrains from using single-use plastic (54%). But even here, the number of people who do this consistently is comparatively small. Only just under 40% of the people use green electricity, and only a quarter compensate for CO₂. Here, the 'war generation' is at the forefront with older Swiss offsetting twice as much CO₂ as everyone else. And, at best, one fifth of those surveyed buy second-hand products - in this case, it is primarily younger people. In the future, however, a third of the Swiss are motivated to urgently reduce their own consumption and use (37%), and to avoid single-use plastic products (35%) and waste when shopping (33%).

Responsibility for plastic waste - the tragedy of the commons

The awareness of the plastic problem is great - but the question about responsibility has so far hampered clear steps for action. As is so often the case for environmental issues, the problem of the commons is also confirmed in the case of plastic. In the case of common property which can be used by all, it often leads to no one feeling directly responsible. As a result, freely available but limited resources, such as a healthy environment, are used inefficiently, so that in the end it is threatened.

In order to solve the plastic problem, the population sees end-consumers and the private sector as being primarily responsible, immediately followed by the State and relevant authorities, as well as science and new technologies. Finally, NGOs are seen as having the least responsibility.

Conclusion: great wish for legally binding measures

More than half of the Swiss want to see stringent measures and legal interventions put in place. In plain terms: legal requirements must be put in place quickly and consistently to ban microplastics from consumer goods, to curb plastic production in general and to sensibly reduce the consumption of single-use plastic, according to the poll. When it comes to the question of legally binding measures, generations differ: The 'war generation' is strongly in favour of consistently implementing existing laws to prevent plastic pollution. Younger people, on the other hand, would rather like to see more far-reaching laws. There is also a clear political left-right divide: the further to the left of the political spectrum a person's affinities lie, the more likely they are to vote in favour of stricter measures against plastic pollution.

About 50% want Switzerland to take a leading role in the international plastics treaty

Across all party affinities, it is clear that Switzerland should participate in an international treaty against plastic pollution. Almost 50% would like Switzerland to take leadership here. The more right-wing a person's political affiliation, the less he or she wants to see such a leading role.

"The Swiss population's perception of the problem is high, but they do not see themselves as being primarily responsible for solving the plastic problem. Interventions by the State are clearly desired. It is now up to the political representatives to make policy for the future and to sharpen the legal framework," says McLellan. Yet, compared to other countries, Swiss policy has so far not distinguished itself on the issue of plastic waste. Already in 2019 (with

effect from 2021), the EU Single-Use Plastic Directive has banned a selection of single-use plastic articles, and also the EU Green Deal deals with the issue in detail. In Switzerland, we lack such far-reaching regulations. Switzerland must now finally follow suit and apply and expand the legal basis for avoiding plastic pollution," McLellan concludes.

This survey is part of a large-scale initiative by OceanCare to reduce plastic in Switzerland. The study conducted by gfs.bern surveyed 1,013 Swiss residents, proportioned according to age, gender and language region. The representative survey took place over a 14-day period from 20th June to 3rd July 2022.

We will keep you informed about further measures.

Are you interested in the poll itself? Would you like to arrange an interview with OceanCare to discuss the consequences of the survey and our package of measures?

Please feel free to call me: Ilka Franzmann, +49 – 170 - 280 51 81

Best regards

Ilka Franzmann

Ilka Franzmann

communication manager OceanCare

Phone: +49 – 170 - 280 51 81

E-Mail: ifranzmann@oceancaare.org

About OceanCare

OceanCare has been a passionate and science-based advocate for healthy living oceans since 1989. The Swiss-based non-governmental organisation holds Special Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC and contributes internationally to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030). Marine pollution and climate crisis, species protection and directed hunts are key issues. OceanCare is setting in motion groundbreaking reforms - from functioning marine protected areas to a strong UN High Seas Agreement and a global treaty on plastic pollution prevention, to preventing oil and gas exploration in the seabed. We are making a difference. More at: www.oceancaare.org