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Chemicals

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Subject: Summary Note on the Workshop on sustainable feedstock for plastics

The workshop was attended by approximately 25 participants, representing the European Commission, industry associations, companies (including chemical companies, plastics converters, consumer goods manufacturers and waste collectors), and civil society.

The Commission presented the Joint Research Centre's (JRC) work supporting the plastics strategy, in particular on the assessment of environmental sustainability of alternative feedstocks (including recycled plastics, biomass and CO₂). JRC proposes to use the Lifecycle Assessment (LCA) approach, as well as indicators on resource efficiency and other sustainability impacts.

Participants expressed support for the project and acknowledged the LCA approach as one of the elements to assess sustainability. Various technical aspects of the project were discussed, such as the comparators and the methods used to assess circularity. Some participants stressed the importance of giving equal consideration to both biomass and recycled plastics. Furthermore, the availability of feedstock and the security of supply were raised as relevant factors. LCA was also considered to be useful to identify hotspots where the sustainability impacts are expected to be the most significant.

On the diversification of feedstock, participants discussed the trade-offs between the different alternative feedstocks. Some participants advocated focusing more on novel technologies for bio-based feedstocks, while others underlined the importance of recycling as a widely applicable solution. In response, some participants advocated material-neutral performance-driven solutions. Others stressed the importance of waste prevention, which is technology-neutral, thereby avoiding a lock-in effect for certain technologies.

Various recommendations were raised and discussed, including improving the collection/sorting of plastic waste, setting recycling targets, green public procurement and improving extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes. Some participants also underlined the importance of investing in new technologies, such as chemical recycling. Better consumer information (e.g. through labelling) and the use of Ecodesign were also raised. Furthermore, participants suggested incentivising environmental performance based on a limited set of criteria. In addition, it was reminded that plastics often replace other materials that may be much less sustainable, underlining the need for a comprehensive LCA approach.