

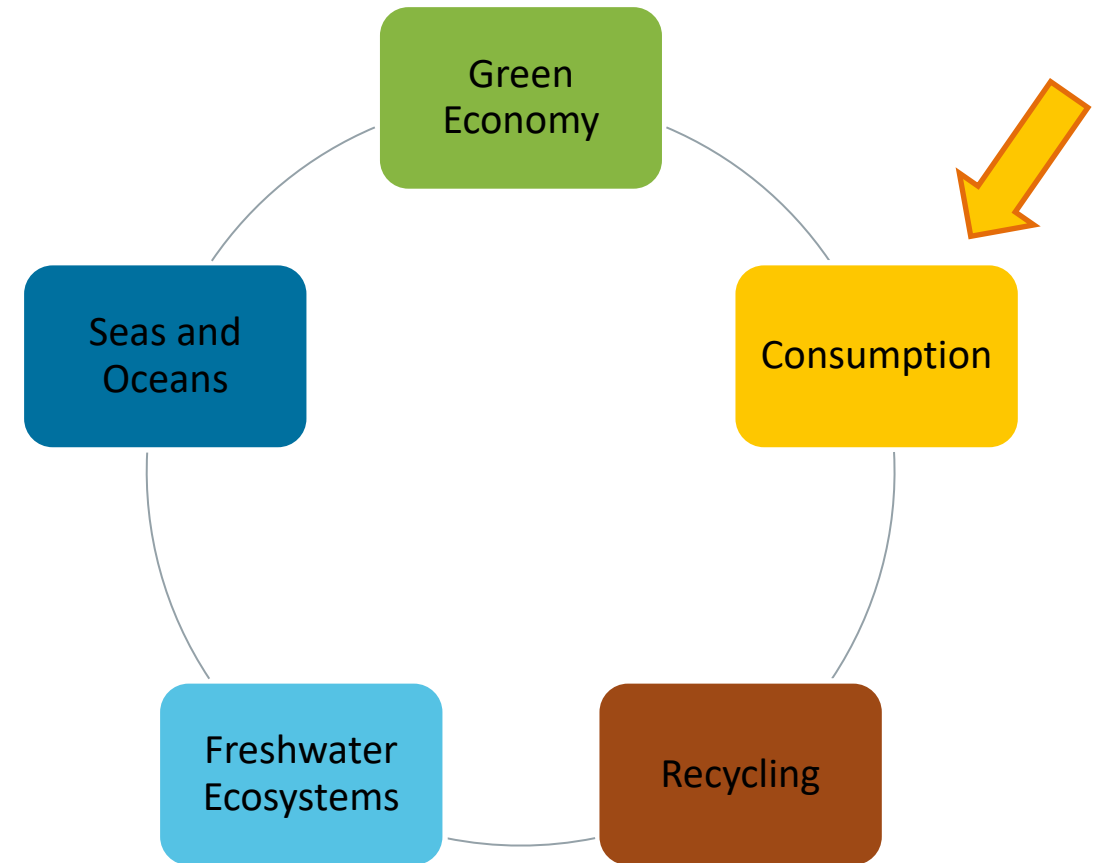
The challenge of reducing (micro)plastic emissions

Possible contribution of consumers and recommendations for effective policy interventions

Linda Mederake, Ecologic Institute
Paris, 8 March 2023

Research Focus „Plastics in the environment“

- » started in 2017
- » 20 joint research projects
- » funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research
- » focus on:
 - » entry paths, distribution and effects of plastics in the environment
 - » measures to reduce/avoid entries



Media communication and political measures focus on the responsibility of private consumers

for instance,

- » German newspapers appeal to “citizen-consumers” as problem solvers (Schönbauer/Müller 2021)
- » the EU Single-Use Plastics Directive focuses mostly on consumers as the source of pollution (Daskalakis et al. 2022)

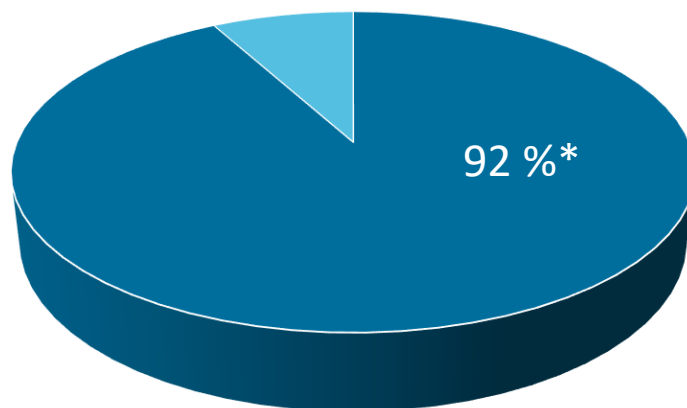


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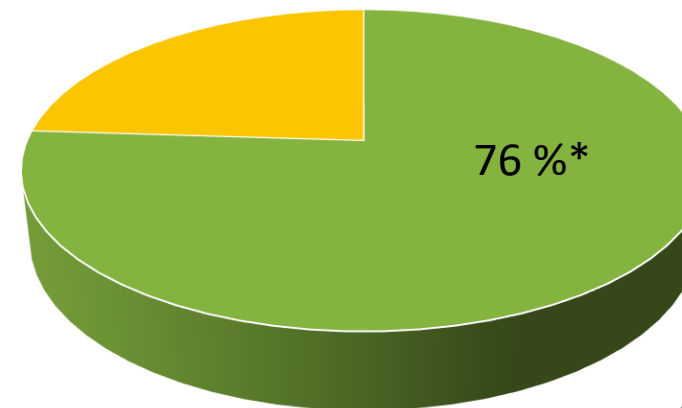
Private consumers perceive (micro)plastics in the environment as a problem

... and are willing to reduce their plastics consumption (e.g. packaging)

plastic waste in the environment is threatening
the preservation of our natural livelihoods



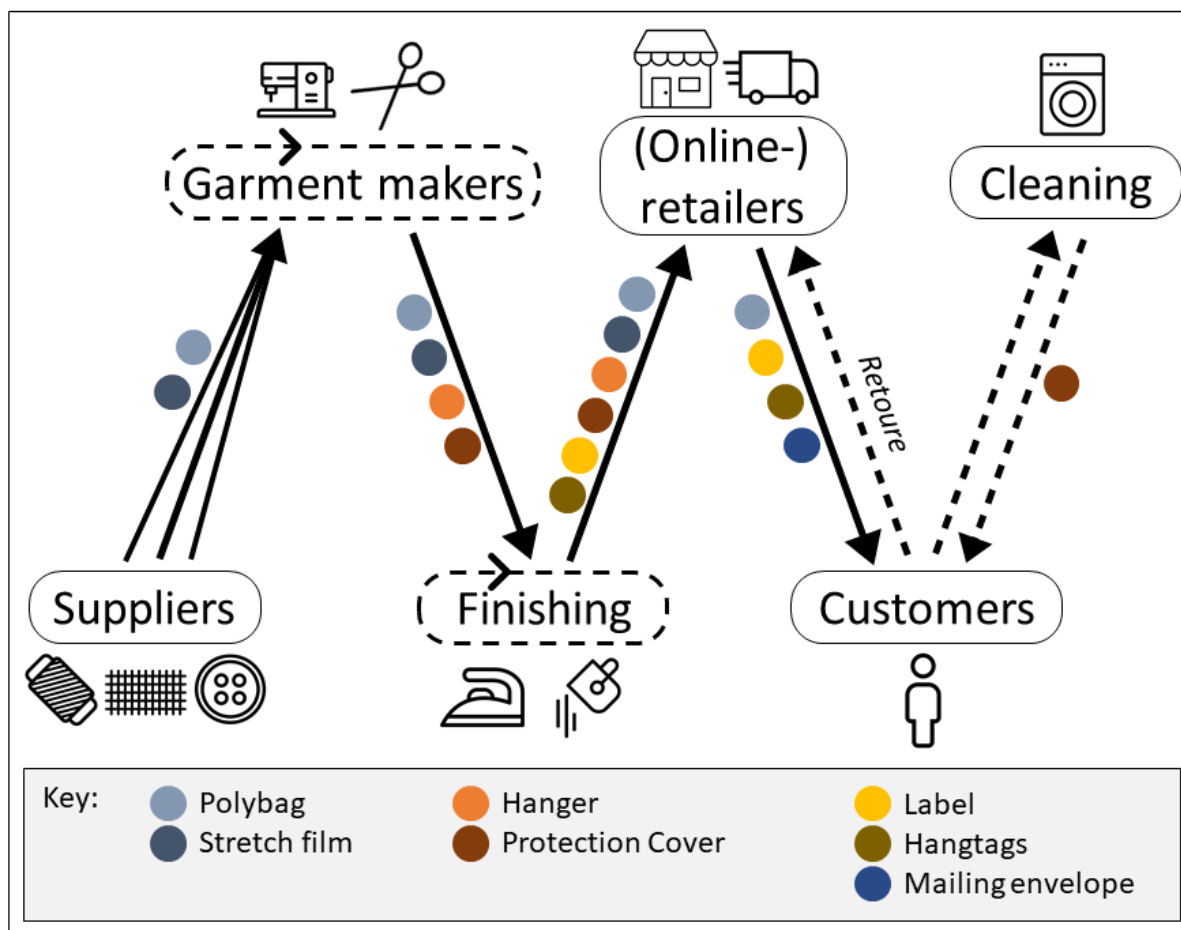
fruits and vegetables should be consistently
offered unpackaged



Wiefek et al. 2021a

*sum of "mostly agree" and "completely agree" responses

Consumers scope for action is limited



Photos: © Thomas
Decker 2018

Consumers scope for action is limited

- » demand by consumers alone does not sufficiently stimulate companies to reduce plastics and prioritize reuse in their product design

moreover:

- » numerous personal and structural factors keep consumers from reducing their plastics consumption



Korta_L | Fotolia

”

The plastics problem is not the responsibility of individual actors, but of all those who produce, trade, use, recycle and dispose of plastic products and packaging. Beyerl et al. 2022

A paradigm shift is needed

- » focus on the reduction of production and consumption of plastics
- » base the use of plastics on precautionary principles

Key role of the legislator

- » create a coordinated, binding, comprehensive legal framework that aims to reduce plastic discharges into the environment
- » coordinate the various initiatives of different actors and integrate them into an overall strategy



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Recommendations for policy interventions

- » ensure environmentally-friendly **materials as well as product and packaging designs**
- » require a **transparent declaration** (e.g., via online portals) of the additives, auxiliary materials and other substances used (including quantities) along the entire product life cycle
- » promote the use of **alternative practices** (e.g., unpackaged goods), **reusable systems, deposit-return systems**, and **regional socio-ecological supply systems**



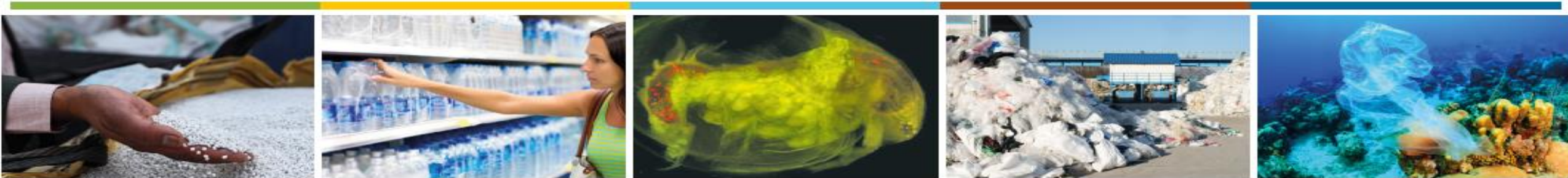
Sarah Chai | Pexels

Collaborative findings and recommendations



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Thank you for your attention!

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